

SPIRITAN LIFE



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**Spiritan
Brothers**

Spiritan Life aims at being a forum for Ongoing Formation and Animation:

- *through the shared experiences of confreres,*
- *through reflection on these experiences,*
- *through the inspiration of our founders, our tradition and the demands of mission today.*

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Editorial	3
The Origin of Brothers in the Congregation	6
<i>Carmo Gomes</i>	
My Personal Experience in the Spiritan Congregation as a Brother	37
<i>Joseph Mba</i>	
A Spiritan Brother at the Service of Mission	40
<i>Jean Claude Kibinda</i>	
A Letter from Brother Oliver Dowling	48
<i>Oliver Dowling</i>	
Being a Brother in a Clerical Missionary Congregation	51
<i>Javier Blanco</i>	
A Missionary in Brussels	55
<i>Christian Roberti</i>	
My Presence as a Spiritan in Refugee Camps in Tanzania ...	60
<i>Mariano Espinoza</i>	
My Journey to the Religious Life	64
<i>Constant Tagyang</i>	
A Letter from Brother Francis Sullivan	73
<i>Francis Sullivan</i>	
Spiritan Brothers: Some Reflexions from the Group of Pakistan	75

Spiritan Religious for fifty-five years 77
Edward Gross

Missionary's life journey in France 79
Dominique Wack

Spiritan Life and Vocation 81
Enlarged General Council, Ariccia 2008

SPIRITAN BROTHERS

As this issue of Spiritan Life about and by Spiritan Brothers goes to press we have just heard the sad news of the passing on of Brother Francis Sullivan, an American confrere who has long been appointed to Tanzania. Brother Francis made a deep impact a couple of years ago on a gathering of confreres in Spiritan House, Arusha. It was during the canonical visitation of the General Council to the then East African Province. The visitors were meeting with the confreres of that area. An intense conversation was going on about organization, restructuring and pluri-national circumscriptions. When the conversation was at its most intense, Brother Francis intervened. "What are we doing about Darfur?" he said. Brother Francis was 88 then and I am not sure he would know the expression 'sound-bite', but what he said was the perfect 'sound-bite' and rocked the assembly. Some of us laughed, embarrassed, thinking that the old man had not been following the conversation about organization. With the interpretation of another confrere who knew Brother Francis better than most, the assembly understood that Francis was making a statement and asking a question. Hundreds of thousands of people were living and dying in desperate conditions of hunger and insecurity in Darfur and here we were, a gathering of missionaries dedicated to the poor, talking about the organization of the Congregation. Of course to paraphrase an idea voiced once in another situation; he was right and the confreres were not wrong. There was a need to talk about organization at that moment and that conversation bore much fruit later on.

The interesting thing about the intervention of Brother Francis was that what he said stayed in the minds of everybody present at that meeting. At the Generalate we remembered it as soon as we heard of his death. Even more interesting is that at the time of his death a Spiritan team from the Union of Circumscriptions of East Africa has been visiting Southern Sudan trying to work out where and in what ministry we Spiritans can become involved there. Brother Francis will surely be intervening in the heavenly forum on behalf of this project.

When we began to prepare this issue of Spiritan Life the plan was to ask living brothers to write their story or something about being a brother in the Congregation. We are proud to present a short beautiful letter from Brother Francis as well as many other contributions from confreres who are brothers from many different parts of the world. We see this issue as an opportunity to share with the wider membership of the Congregation some of the riches which brothers shared with us in the Generalate when we sent out questionnaires about how to promote the brother's vocation in the Congregation.

Apart from the diversity of the ministries brothers who write in this issue are involved in, many other aspects of who the brothers are emerge from the pages. The balance, grace and vision with which some of the older ones have lived their lives of sacrifice in a Congregation which has not always behaved correctly towards them is astounding. Some of their perceptions are very important and helpful to us all to think about our Congregation. In reply to one of the questionnaires a confrere stated (a priest I think) that in our reflection about the brothers we needed to remember that not only the existence of the brothers but the existence of the whole Congregation was at stake. The danger for us all as religious missionaries is that we would be totally absorbed by a clerical function and lose the heart of what it means to be Spiritan. Just as we prepare to send the text to the printers a book has appeared called 'Clericalism, the end of priesthood' by a Jesuit author George Wilson. Like Brother Francis the brothers who are the authors of the stories in this Spiritan Life while telling their story simply and beautifully, also give us some warnings which may help us to be more faithful to our Spiritan vocation.

Bishop Edward Barron is mentioned once again as being at the start of the discovery for Libermann that Brothers were essential to mission. The need for Brothers imposed itself as it were and of course up to this day they have continued to be a key element wherever mission is going on. Some will remind us that Claude François Poullart des Places did not think of having Brothers and neither did Libermann at first. This is just as well. Like St. Paul, Libermann, once he got involved in mission developed his spirituality and theology to make sense of it all. The deci-

sion to have brothers in the Congregation was not an ideological one but rather emerged as an obvious essential component of a mission team which Barron was trying to put together with Libermann's help.

We are conscious that this issue of Spiritan Life could be much more ample with more stories. There is no implicit judgment on any story that we have not included. A number of constraints prevented us including many more contributions. We like to think of this as one contribution to remind us all of what Brothers are doing and could do if we had more in the Congregation and hope that Provinces where brothers have been numerous would make sure that their stories are documented and their history is written.

John Kingston

THE ORIGIN OF BROTHERS IN THE CONGREGATION

In this interesting and rich article Br Carmo writes on the genesis of Brothers in the Congregation and shares with us how laymen took part in the missionary work of evangelisation.

Carmo Gomes

INTRODUCTION

The Congregation of the Holy Spirit under the protection of the Immaculate Heart of Mary came into being with the fusion of two apostolic societies: that of the Seminary of the Holy Spirit, and that of the Society of the Most Holy Heart of Mary.

Claude Francis Poullart des Places had founded the Seminary of the Holy Spirit in 1703. This work was to busy itself with the formation of priests, coming mainly from the ranks of the lower classes. There was no question of a religious congregationⁱ so to speak, and the founder did not foresee the training of Religious. However, from the outset, lay people took part in his work, acting as tailors and cooks. They lived in the Seminary, and their way of life was just like that of the priests of the society, because Poullart des Places had laid down for them an hour and a half of daily prayer, with attendance at Mass, and they were not always paid for their work. These lay folk were living according to a rule which resembled that of the future Auxiliary Brothers. However, we still cannot here talk about real religious life, which only came about through the organisational skills of Libermann and Schwindenhammer.

ⁱ Henri Le Floch judged the work of Poullart des Places to be the beginnings of a Religious Congregation. Cf. Henri le Floch - *Une Vocation et une fondation au siècle de Louis XIV, Claude-François Poullart des Places*, Paris, 1915, 330ss.

In the present study, I propose to describe, first of all, the steps taken by Libermann for the inclusion of Brothers into the groups of priests sent to the Missions. We shall look at the part played in all of this by Libermann's colleagues, Le Vavas seur and Tisserant. We shall also study the influence of Bishop Edward Barron, the Vicar Apostolic of the Two Guineas, who met Libermann at a providential moment in time. I believe that I can say that the Brothers were adjoined to a missionary society founded by priests for priests.

It is now 1843. Bishop Edward Barron, while on his way to Paris, asks Libermann for priests and Brothers to work as missionaries in his Apostolic Prefecture of West Africa.

Libermann was taken by surprise, because he had not yet trained any Brothers. However there were many delays at Bordeaux while the first group of priests were getting ready for embarkation. This fact allowed Libermann to find an alternative answer to the problem; certain local trades people offered to accompany the priests on their venture to Africa.

In this study, we shall see how ordinary men had that courage to set out on a difficult mission, and so brought into being the vocation of the Spiritan Brother.

Part 1: The First Steps

In the 1830s, in Paris, the idea of starting a missionary society which would work in their countries of origin, was thought of by two seminarists, Frederick le Vavas seur and Eugene Tisserant. Both were friends of Libermann. The former came from one of the important families of the island of Bourbon, known today as Reunion. He well knew the unbearable conditions under which the slaves of his father and other planters struggled. Tisserant's mother was from Haiti, and he described a similar situation there to Libermann.

After much reflection and discussion on the part of Le Vavas seur, Tisserant and Libermann, the latter agreed to oversee the Work for the Black Peoples.

1.1 The Common Intuition of Le Vavas seur and Libermann.

As soon as he had finished his priestly formation, Le Vavas seur left for Reunion, in February 1842. In the November of the same year, Tisserant left for Haiti.

They wrote to Libermann, who had remained in Paris. In their letters, there was much said about the orientation of the new society founded for the evangelisation of the slaves.

In the letters of Tisserant, there is no reference to accepting Brothers into the Society. On the other hand, Le Vavas seur makes frequent mention of this. In his view, the work of the mission needed Brothers so that the priests could be more free to practise their particular ministry. The following letter was written some months after his arrival at Reunion:

"Brothers would be of immense benefit to us. Everywhere I encounter poor old people, who need to be married because they are living in concubinage. There is no chance to instruct them, no matter how well disposed they are, because they live far from the nearest church. It is not possible even to gather them together in one place, because they live at a great distance from each other. One missionary on his own cannot hope to go and instruct these poor people, because he would spend the whole day seeing only seven or eight people. He could be spending his time doing more necessary things. If the priest had Brothers, they could go and visit and instruct these poor old people and other persons dispersed in the valleys and on the hills; (...)"ⁱⁱ

In his capacity as co-Founder of the Work for the Black People, Le Vavas seur had realised the importance of incorporating Brothers. He brought this matter to Libermann's attention time and again, even though he knew how open Libermann was to that idea, even if Libermann never

ⁱⁱ Letter from Le Vavas seur to Libermann, of 27th September 1842 in NOTES ET DOCUMENTS relatifs à la vie et à l'oeuvre du Vénérable François-Marie-Paul Libermann, pour distribution privée, Paris, vol.III, 1933, p.520

spoke about it in his Provisional Rule of 1840, in which he says, "*The Congregation of Missionaries of the Most Holy Heart of Mary is a group of Priests, who, in the name of, and as sent by, Our Lord Jesus Christ, devote themselves entirely to preaching his holy Gospel (...).*"ⁱⁱⁱ

The admission of Brothers into the Society of the Most Holy Heart of Mary, signified then a change in the initial statutes of the work. However, in reality, it was only the concretisation of an intuition which Libermann had had from the very beginning. See for example how he describes the first novitiate of La Neuville, in a letter to Mr. Halé, a merchant from Strasbourg, written on 5th October 1841: "*I have only two companions with me, and two Brothers who wish very much to be of service to us, and later on go to help us in foreign lands. One of these two good Brothers is of immense help to us; it is thanks to Providence that we met him.*"^{iv}

So there were candidates wishing to be Brothers. But things are not yet very clear. In the same letter, Libermann considers these "*two Brothers*" as "employees" in the house of formation, who relieved the novices of certain material tasks.^v

ⁱⁱⁱ Règle Provisoire, N.D. II, p.235

Libermann had first of all defined his society as existing for priests alone. We can conclude this from the text of the Provisional Rule given to the first novices at La Neuville in 1841. Nevertheless, our Venerable Father, during his conferences to the novices, added a commentary to the first article of the same Rule, in order to say that the society was formed of Priests and Brothers. Cf. François NICOLAS - *Règle Provisoire des missionnaires de Libermann (la naissance d'un code de spiritualité missionnaire). Texte et commentaire*, pro manuscrito, Mortain, 1967, 2 - 3.

In addition, we can verify from a copy of a manuscript of Fr. Arragon, that there were two kinds of candidates: "*We only accept two kinds of people: 1st priests or those who can one day be priests, 2nd lay people to be Brothers.*" Athanase BOUCHARD et François NICOLAS - *Synopse des deux Règles de Libermann précédée de la première Règle Spiritaine. Texte intégral et authentique*, pro manuscrito, Paris, 1968, p.168.

All the same, I maintain that the society was founded only for priests. Cf. André GUELLEC - *La mission du frère d'après Libermann*, in *Spiritus*, 13 - *frère missionnaire*, 1962, p.397

^{iv} Letter of Libermann to Mr. Halé, 5th October 1841, N.D. III, p.30

^v Cf. René CHARRIER - *Les Frères Courage, Mémoire Spiritains 1*, Paris, 1944, p.18

While our Venerable Father remained in France responsible for the orientation of the new missionary society, Le Vasseur had already arrived among the Black People. Libermann wished to know the first impressions Le Vasseur had about the country, and asked him: *“What do you think about Brothers? Will it be good for us to accept them into our Society? Would you know how to employ them in Reunion? Would they be of any help to you in dealing with the local people?”*^{vi}

The letter of Libermann with its abundance of questions had still not arrived in Reunion when Le Vasseur wrote on the same subject. It is astonishing to see the agreement of thought on this question between the missionary on Reunion and Libermann.

1.2 The Role of Brothers according to Le Vasseur

In the letters sent to Libermann during the year 1842, Le Vasseur tried to define the role of Brothers in the mission. He said there were two things expected of them: a minimum of formation, and a good character testimonial.

Le Vasseur was not terribly bothered about the particular trade a Brother would practise. He was more concerned about the quality of life the Brother had, whether on the human or on the spiritual plane. For Le Vasseur, a Brother was primarily an auxiliary for the priest, and therefore ready to do pastoral work. In the last part of one of his letters to Libermann, Le Vasseur describes his work in the district of Sainte-Suzanne. He speaks of helping the sick, the aged, and those who were asking for Baptism. Le Vasseur had employed a Creole to help him, but regretted the fact that he had no Brothers. He wrote, *“... and I hope that out of these corrupt bodies will come innocent and glorious souls fit for heaven. It is for just such a type of ministry that Brothers would be precious, but how holy they need to be for such a work! They need much*

^{vi} Letter of Libermann to Le Vasseur, 9th June 1842, N.D. III, p.207

courage and zeal if they are to climb the mountains in the overpowering heat and go to people who are half corrupt, brutish, coarse. For such people it is necessary to repeat twenty times that there is only one God, before they finally grasp it. It is even more urgent that they hear these words from a holy person. The man bringing the Good News must have in himself the essence of the apostolic spirit. But two or three good Brothers, with that spirit, would be for us as good as two or three priests. They must in addition be very capable of teaching catechism, because giving the catechism to people like the Blacks is a thousand times more difficult than preaching.” ^{vii}

Le Vavas seur was certainly very optimistic! He would change with time, for he was writing only at the beginning of his ministry on Reunion.

1.3 A Different Point of View

In actual fact, within a few months, Le Vavas seur’s first enthusiasm had waned. He had asked for at least one Brother who could practice a trade and help priests in pastoral work. However, when Libermann offered him somebody, Le Vavas seur began to object. This is how he replied to his Superior:

“As for Mr. Saint Albin, you think that he has by now arrived here. He has not, and I swear I would give much for his non-appearance. You seem to be fixed on the idea that I would welcome him into my community. But you would soon change your attitude if you could even see for a moment as I do how probable it is that he will not persevere here. It will bring us great embarrassment with the people of Reunion, if they see one of us turning out wrong. It will cause infinite damage in the minds of the populace.” ^{viii}

^{vii} Letter of Le Vavas seur to Libermann, 13th December 1842, N. D. III, p.538

^{viii} Letter of Le Vavas seur to Libermann, 6th May 1843, N.D. VI, p.526

In another letter written in the following year, 1844, Le Vavas seur did not completely exclude the possibility of accepting Brothers, but he attached many preconditions, and showed himself reluctant to allow them to take part in pastoral ministry:

"Send one Brother, but make sure he is holy, and ready to confine himself to the material needs of the house and sacristy. He could also give religious instruction to the seriously ill, those in danger of death, and to certain old people who would be invited to the mission house. But no more than that! It would be very inconvenient for us to have to give the least public function to a Brother."^{ix}

Scarcely a few days later, in another letter, the missionary on Reunion insisted on the same approach: *"As for Reunion and the other colonies, where a similar situation prevails, my attitude is very much more restrictive than formerly. Brothers here could not without the greatest inconvenience take part in the sacred ministry. The most one could use them for is to instruct especially the old people, the sick, and other such. They could, for example, be very useful as regards the material side of the mission, but it is necessary that they are holy. If you tell me that such people are impossible to find, then I reply to you and ask you to send nobody. (...) they must be very holy, and must have a way of life which brings with it great reserve, and the prudence, I will not say of a serpent, but of an angel. They must have at the same time a love which gives them entry into all hearts, and opens all hearts to them. When you find such a Brother, then send him. Unfortunately, we ourselves are not men of such calibre, so how can we expect to find Brothers like that? As far as Reunion goes, Brothers are of no use to us at all apart from looking after the material needs of the communities."*^x

The project of Le Vavas seur to receive Brothers was now enormously narrowed, and Libermann will not dream any longer of sending him Brothers. The Brothers would instead be sent to Guinea and Haiti. Nev-

^{ix} Letter of Le Vavas seur to Libermann, 5th July 1844, N.D. VI, p.612

^x Letter of Le Vavas seur to Libermann, 13th July 1844, N.D. VI, p.614

ertheless, Libermann will write once again to his confrere on Reunion, a year later, 1845, to ask him if he would like to receive any Brothers. *“If you give me your exact ideas on the subject, and if things work out, I will try to prepare Brothers who will know how to do the different tasks expected of them”*^{xi}

Part 2. The First Missioners of the Holy Heart of Mary

Towards the end of 1842, the Society of the Holy Heart of Mary got five priests ready to go on mission. Initially, they had been prepared for the islands of the French colonies, namely Haiti, Reunion and Mauritius. Missionaries of the Holy Heart of Mary had already gone there.

However, the political situation had become more delicate. The French State did not recognise the new Society. In addition, apart from having no support in Metropolitan France, the Society was forbidden to enter any of the French colonial territories.

At Christmastime 1842, Libermann went up to Paris and spoke with Fr. Desgenettes about this situation. It was a new trial for his little Society, and he brought it to the Most Holy Heart of Mary, in the presence of the director of the Archconfraternity of Our Lady of Victories.

The very next day, he returned to La Neuville. But almost immediately Bishop Edward Barron, Vicar Apostolic of the Two Guineas arrived at the church of Our Lady of Victories. He was looking for missionaries for his Vicariate. *“As soon as Bishop Barron had finished his devotions, Fr. Desgenettes offered our work for his Mission. The Bishop was very taken with the idea and wished to meet Fr. Libermann.”*^{xii}

^{xi} Letter of Libermann to Le Vavas seur, 18th December 1845, N.D. VII, p.426

^{xii} Following the Memorandum of Fr. Tisserant, N.D. IV, p.23

2.1 The Incorporation of the Brothers

Before going to Paris and meeting Fr. Desgenettes, Bishop Barron had already made an appeal to the Secretary of Propaganda Fide in Rome. In a short report dated 8th September 1842, the Vicar Apostolic had presented a series of instructions or proposals for the good development of the mission in his Vicariate. After a number of observations concerning material conditions, he continued:

“no. 13. The Prefect considers that the tribes have excellent dispositions for hearing the Gospel, and accepting it. But in order for the Mission to succeed, it is absolutely essential to establish schools among the people. In these establishments the teaching of Christian Doctrine is not the only thing necessary. In addition, we must civilise these people and attract them to ourselves and gain their confidence. This can be done by using pictures, giving gifts, but above all by the teaching of agriculture, and of mechanics, which will be of the greatest utility to them. For example, we should train carpenters, blacksmiths, bakers, etc....

no. 14. One of the main reasons for my journey to Europe is to be able to introduce all these manual trades among the local populations.

(...)

no. 19 The most sure way of making this Mission prosperous and permanent is to confide it to a body of missionaries, who have also lay Brothers, able to impart the various mechanical trades;”^{xiii}

This text then had been written before his journey to France. But once in Paris, and following his wishes, the Bishop met Libermann and his priests. He showed his readiness to welcome them to Guinea.

Bishop Barron continued on his voyage making a visit to England, from where he kept up a correspondence with the Superior of the Society of the Most Holy Heart of Mary. In January 1843, he wrote:

^{xiii} Report of Bishop Barron, N.D. V, pp.27-28

“Since I had the consolation of seeing you together with your esteemed confreres, the idea has come into my mind more than once of writing to you about taking with us from France, Brothers or rather tradesmen who would be prepared to become Brothers. Finally I took the resolution to write to you about it, and though the time is short and our departure must not be postponed, I think we ought to look for them. It is true that it would be better to be alone than to have unworthy companions, but God in his great goodness has already done everything necessary for the success of our enterprise. God will surely help you to find a few. The kind of person we are really looking for is what the English call a ‘handyman’, able to turn his hand to anything. In addition we need an ironworker or a blacksmith, a carpenter or a joiner. These latter would be of the greatest importance, not only for helping us, but also for attracting the poor indigenous people who would then do everything for God when they see that we are doing all we can for their benefit.”^{xiv}

Bishop Barron felt the same worries about accepting Brothers into his Vicariate as Le Vasseur had during his early months of mission on Reunion. But the first correspondence of the Bishop makes no reference to the human and spiritual formation of Brothers. One year later, when he was faced with the reality, he had a similar reaction to that of Le Vasseur as we have already noticed.^{xv}

2.2 Ready to leave for the Missions

We are now in the middle of February 1843. The departure for Guinea is expected to take place in the following month. The priests of the Holy Heart of Mary have arrived in Bordeaux. Bishop Barron is in England and is expected to return to France in July 1843.

^{xiv} Letter of Bishop Barron to Libermann, 9th January 1843, N.D. V, p.40

^{xv} Bishop Barron wrote to Libermann on 9th February 1844: “I would hesitate to send other Brothers until they have been well formed, even though there is a lot against having near naked servants in our missions. I would never allow that, whatever happens elsewhere.” N.D. V, p.56

Mr. Germainville^{xvi}, a friend of Libermann living in Bordeaux, had been asked to make the final preparations for the voyage to Guinea. In addition to that, he proposed to Libermann that he accepts pious laymen ready to accompany the priests.^{xvii}

The first to be chosen was a young cooper, Mr. Bernet. Libermann was ready to receive him into La Neuville to offer him some time for formation in the new Society. That is the import of what Libermann wrote to Germainville on 16th February: *"I believe it would be well for the young cooper to come and pass some time in the Novitiate. Please send him as soon as you can."*^{xviii}

There was little time to spare since the departure had been scheduled for March 1843. But the first candidate was not sent to Amiens. Fr. Bessieux "examined" him himself at Bordeaux, and decided it would be safer not to allow him to join the group.^{xix}

In the meantime, Bishop Barron wrote from England to postpone the departure for five months. Instead of March, the voyage would take place in August. That meant that the missionaries would arrive in Africa in the season not so dangerous to their health. What a disappointment for the five priests who wanted to leave immediately!

Libermann now realised that the Bishop needed to come back to France before the departure of his missionaries. The expedition would be much better organised if they did it together.

^{xvi} Mr. Germainville was a layman involved with social work in Bordeaux. For a fuller account of Mr. Germainville, cf. Georges-Henri THIBAULT - *Homme d'oeuvres entreprenant, ami du P. Libermann, M. Germainville (1806-1881)*, in *Mémoire Spiritaine*, no. 6, deuxième semestre 1997, pp.119-142.

^{xvii} Fr. Bessieux, Superior of the mission group about to leave, has given us an account of the steps taken to find tradesmen willing to go with them. Cf. Note of Bishop Bessieux, 16th June 1862, N.D. V, pp. 322 seq.

^{xviii} Letter of Libermann to Germainville 16th February 1843, N.D. IV, p.115

^{xix} Cf. Fragment of Fr. Bessieux of 5th September 1843, N.D. V, p.254; Cf. also: Notes Diverses de Mgr. Bessieux, 16th June 1862, N.D. V, p.322

The time was passing, and while there were new offers of laymen ready to join the priests, Libermann was not willing to accept them without reference to the Bishop. That was because since the laymen were not Religious, the Bishop would have to take full responsibility for them under the heading of material assets. In the following letter to a deacon called Ducoumau, we can see the feelings of Libermann regarding the lay candidates waiting for a reply from him:

“The three Brothers from the orphanage which Mr. Germainville has at his home, are causing me problems. I have still not told Mr. Germainville that I can accept them. I would prefer to have an answer from Bishop Barron on this question. I cannot accept Brothers for the Mission of Guinea without the agreement of the Bishop, because he is the one who must be responsible for their joining us.”^{xx}

At this moment in time, everyone is waiting for Bishop Barron. His return from England is expected in July. He finally arrived at La Neuville in the middle of August, and agreed with our Venerable Father to accept Gregory SIXTE into the group.^{xxi}

Bishop Barron thought he would find in France a small group of Capuchins from Italy who would join the expedition with the missionaries of the Holy Heart of Mary. At the end of the day, they did not arrive. The Bishop meanwhile was spending the whole time trying to increase the group of apostles. Libermann offered him a young priest, Jean-Louis MAURICE, recently admitted into the Society. Bishop Barron accepted him wholeheartedly.

Meanwhile, The Vicar Apostolic had decided to “give a chance” to a Eudist priest, Paul LAVAL, to take part in the same expedition.^{xxii}

^{xx} Letter of Libermann to Ducoumau, 1st May 1843, N.D. IV, p.211.

^{xxi} Cf. Letter of Libermann to Germainville, 13th August 1843, N.D. IV, p.320.

^{xxii} Libermann himself had not wished to receive the Eudist Paul LAVAL immediately into his new Society for fear of offending Fr. Louis, the Superior of the Eudists. Cf. André DUGUY and Gérard VIEIRA - *La reprise des missions sur le côtes de “Guinée”: Mgr. Barron, 1841-1845*, (Édition en brochure), Dakar 1995, p.20.

2.3 The Laymen join the Expedition at the last Moment.

Initially, Libermann's group going to Guinea consisted of five priests: Jean Marie Rémy BESSIEUX^{xxiii}, (Superior of the group), Francis BOUCHET^{xxiv}, Jean Louis ROUSSEL^{xxv}, Louis Marie AUDEBERT^{xxvi}, and Leopold de RÉGNIER^{xxvii}.

On the arrival of Bishop Barron from England, two others were admitted into the group: Jean Louis MAURICE and Paul LAVAL^{xxviii}

On the new departure date, August 1843, Libermann said his goodbyes at the Square in La Neuville. The seven priests then went to Bordeaux. However, the departure was once more postponed for several weeks - it was a happy disappointment for it allowed them to increase the number of departing missionaries!

The first layman prepared to accompany them, Gregory SIXTE, a tailor, was admitted into the group with Libermann's approval. But in the comings and goings of the last days before leaving, two other laymen joined the group. They were Andrew BATASAC, a cobbler, and John FABÉ a grinder by profession.

When finally the day of departure dawned, the 13th September 1843, there were ten men heading for the mission of the Two Guineas, seven priests and three laymen.

^{xxiii} Born 24 December 1803 at Vellieux, Hérault, in the diocese of Montpellier. He died in Gabon 30th April 1876.

^{xxiv} Born 2nd June 1816 at Cruseilles in Savoy. Died 28th May 1844 on the way to Cape Lahou.

^{xxv} Born 10th March 1815 at Amiens. Died 23 January 1844 at Cape Palmas.

^{xxvi} Born 3rd March 1813 at Noyon in Oise. Died at Grand Bassam 6th July 1844.

^{xxvii} Born 9th August 1807 at Saint Marc de Reus in Orne. Died at Grand Bassam 30th December 1843 at Cape Palmas.

^{xxviii} Jean Louis MAURICE was born in 1812 at Corsept, in Loire Atlantique: he left the Society in 1844 and died in the United States. Paul LAVAL was born in 1816 at Condé-Sur-Noireau in Calvados, and died on 14th July 1844 at Assinie.

2.4 The Agreement of Libermann

Our Venerable Father did not make any real agreement between his Society and the three laymen sent to Guinea. We know that Gregory SIXTE had received a little preparatory training, but the two others had not even met Libermann. They left without having done any novitiate and without having pronounced their vows in the missionary Society of the Holy Heart of Mary.

It must be remembered that our Venerable Father was not yet Superior of a Religious Congregation, and that the question of the admission of Brothers, or rather of laymen who would go with the priests, could not be imagined in the way that we do so nowadays. In that era, there had been no question of admitting Brothers into the missionary Society. The Founder was preoccupied with the problem but without being able to draw upon any precedents in the matter.

2.4.1. From the Material Point of View

As they were about to leave for Guinea, Bishop Barron wrote to Libermann asking him to take other official steps concerning the project. Libermann accepted the request, and immediately wrote to the Ministry of the Navy and that of the Colonies to ask their support not only for the seven priests but also for the three laymen going with them:

"I immediately went to Paris and saw the Minister. He was very favourable to the idea. The Minister is actually a very religious man.

I presented the proposals in which I agreed to send the seven missionaries and three Brothers (lately left for Africa) to the French trading posts which had been newly established on the African coast.

(...)

Our missionaries will have complete liberty in the exercise of their religious ministry and will in no way be under the civil authorities in matters spiritual or concerning their conscience."^{xxix}

^{xxix} Letter of Libermann to Gamon, 7th December 1843, N.D. IV, p. 453.

The agreement was made. The Director of the Colonies promised to pay the expenses of the journey to Africa. The work of the priests and Brothers would be subsidised by the Government. This is the happy way that Libermann solved the problem which he had previously brought up, of being responsible for his missionaries.

2.4.2. From the Moral Point of View

However, our Venerable Father had a yet more difficult problem to solve, namely, the status of the laymen in his Society. This was of little concern to Bishop Barron, but it was one which deeply worried Libermann, as we can see in the following private letter written to Mr. Germainville:

"I have no idea at all about what took place in Bordeaux. I have no details about the actions of the missionaries or of the charitable people aiding them. I have heard nothing about the admission of Brothers into the group. I know that the missionaries found two laymen to help them at Bordeaux, for I have a memorandum on the matter, but I have received no letter from Fr. Bessieux announcing the fact."^{xxx}

Some months later, in a letter to the confreres on Reunion telling them about developments in the new Society, Libermann alluded to the situation of the Brothers who had left from Bordeaux without having made a novitiate:

"In the matter of the Brothers, they^{xxxi} have committed a fault, but out of necessity. The mistake is that they left with them from Bordeaux, without any previous novitiate being made. They even forgot to send me their names, or any details. I admit they were under pressure, because it was

^{xxx} Letter of Libermann to Germainville, 22nd September 1843, N.D. IV, p.345

^{xxxi} Libermann is referring to his priests, especially Fr. Bessieux, the Superior of the group. Libermann had previously written to Fr. Bessieux asking him to give the Christian and surnames, together with the ages, of these "late arrivals". Cf. Letter of Libermann to Fr. Bessieux, September 1843, N.D. IV, p.327

impossible to get established in Guinea without the presence of Brothers. I know that one of them is called John Fabé^{xxxii}. These good Brothers will give them a hard time. ”^{xxxiii}

Libermann here expresses his doubts concerning the arrival of the Brothers, given their lack of formation. In fact the problems would arise from another quarter.

2.5 Sufferings in Guinea.

The missionary group arrived at Cape Palmas on 30th November 1843. They had to wait for the arrival of Bishop Barron. However, waiting is always difficult, and brings its own dangers. Most of the missionaries fell ill. Brother Gregory received the Sacrament of the Sick on 20th December and was in agony for a month. In the meantime, the others also succumbed as was described later by Brother Peter Mersy who had heard all about it from Brother Gregory^{xxxiv}:

“The pious Fr. de Régnier set about planting sweet potatoes, to make a change from rice. He worked bare headed under the African sun. Poor Brother Gregory was still in bed sick with fever. Good Fr. de Régnier took to his bed in the same room as the poor Brother, and died without Brother Gregory realising it, so ill was the latter. Fr. de Régnier had already received the Last Sacraments. Good Fr. Reussel dug the grave of Fr. de Régnier, and as soon as he had been buried, Fr. Roussel himself went into the bed of the dead priest, right beside Brother Gregory, who still had no idea of what was happening. It was only on the death of Fr. Roussel that Brother Gregory returned to his senses. He thought it was Fr. de Régnier who was in the next bed. Fr. Bessieux told him that Fr. de Régnier was already dead and buried and that Fr. Roussel had just died. ”^{xxxv}

^{xxxii} (sic)

^{xxxiii} Letter of Libermann to the Community on Reunion, 25th February 1844, N.D. VI, p.79-80

^{xxxiv} From the description given by Brother Peter Mersy later on in this study.

^{xxxv} *Notes sur le F. Grégoire*, December 1863, N.D. V, pp.329-330

Fr. de Régnier died on 30th December 1843, and Fr. Roussel died on 23 January 1844. They were then the first losses of the group.

During those days, the catechist who had come with Fr. John Kelly, Mr. Denis Pindar, died. Immediately following this, Fr. Kelly, who had just welcomed Libermann's missionaries, refused to wait for the arrival of his bishop; he lost heart completely and returned to Europe on 18th January 1844.

2.5.1. The Arrival of Bishop Barron

Bishop Barron arrived at Goree on 7th January 1844. He thought he would find his group of missionaries there. However there was a letter for him from Fr. Bessieux, informing him that everyone had left for Cape Palmas the previous month. He was much perturbed and wrote to Libermann on 9th January: *"Dear Father Superior, all of this makes me full of regret that our missioners, who were supposed to stay in Goree^{xxxvi}, had not waited there until my arrival."*^{xxxvii}

The missionaries had in fact all gone to Cape Palmas because that is how they interpreted what Libermann said in a letter to Fr. Bessieux. So Bishop Barron now had to make his way to Cape Palmas in order to be able to organise the group. He wanted to bring back two priests and one Brother to Goree, but the Bishop was as yet unaware of the losses suffered by his missionaries.

2.5.2. The Organisation of the Group

Libermann's missionaries had arrived at Cape Palmas on 30th November 1843, and were awaiting the arrival of the Bishop with impatience. The Vicar Apostolic finally reached them on 1st March 1844. Bishop Barron

^{xxxvi} (sic)

^{xxxvii} Letter of Bishop Barron to Libermann, 9th January 1844, N.D. V, p. 50

left the ship with two other Irish missionaries, the deacon James Keily and a layman John Egan.

The very same day, the Bishop called a meeting of the missionaries to tell them of his plan to divide the group in order to send them to different missions^{xxxviii}. But he very quickly realised that the group at his disposal was much reduced^{xxxix}.

The missionaries were still coming to terms with their shock at the deaths of their two confreres. They were much concerned, and Bishop Barron hesitated to take any definite decisions. Then out of the blue, the very next day, the Vicar Apostolic decided that everybody was to take ship for Grand Bassam. Only Fr. Bessieux and Jean Fabé were to remain at Cape Palmas, in order to send on their movable property.

After several days of sailing under the stifling sun, the Bishop with the agreement of the missionaries decided to split the group in two. Fr. Bouchet, Fr. Maurice, Brother Andrew, John Egan, the deacon James Keily and the Bishop would stay at Assinie. Fr. Audebert, Fr. Laval and Brother Gregory would sail on until they reached Grand Bassam. It was also agreed that the Superior, Fr. Bessieux, would rejoin the group at Assinie once he had arrived at Cape Palmas. Then Fr. Bouchet would leave Assinie to go to Grand Bassam as the new Superior^{xl}.

However, Fr. Bouchet was not to take up his appointment as Superior. He died at sea in May 1844, in the presence of Bishop Barron. Likewise the deacon James Keily, one month later, on 11th June 1844.

At the beginning of July, a doctor paid a visit to the mission of Assinie. He noted the amount of fever present among the missionaries, and the unsanitary conditions in which they were living. He gave orders that all

^{xxxviii} Cf. Journal of Fr. Audebert, N.D. V, pp.222 seq.

^{xxxix} Fr. de Régnier and Fr. Roussel were missing from Libermann's group, and Fr. Kelly and his catechist were missing from the "diocesan" group.

^{xl} Cf. Letter of Fr. Audebert to Libermann, 15th April 1844, N.D. V, p.274

who were willing should return immediately to France. Brother Andrew, John Egan, Fr. Maurice and Bishop Barron finally arrived in Europe.

While all this was going on, Fr. Laval came from Grand Bassam to make a visit to Assinie. He was too ill to join the others on the ship. *“He was left dying in the trading post of Assinie, where he finally expired on 14th July 1844”*^{xli}, a few days after the departure of his confreres.

On his arrival in Europe about two months later, Bishop Barron offered Rome his resignation as Vicar Apostolic of the Two Guineas^{xlii}.

Part 3: The Mission of the First Brothers

Even if we are dealing with historical facts which concern laymen, who were not Religious, accompanying the priests of the Holy Heart of Mary, we shall see that these lay people give us a testimony which enables us to consider them as “founders of their vocation” of Brothers in the new Society.

3.1 Bessieux and Gregory

The Superior of Libermann’s group, Fr., Bessieux, was at Cape Palmas, while Gregory was at Grand Bassam.

Although the missionary group in Assinie was sent back to France together with the Bishop of the Two Guineas, the others, who did not know what was going on, stayed at their posts.

At Grand Bassam, Fr. Audebert died on 6th July, and Fr. Laval died on 14th July, when he reached Assinie. Gregory was now alone.

^{xli} Cf. Addition to the Journal of Fr. Audebert by Fr. Duparquet, N.D. V, p.248

^{xlii} Cf. Letters of Bishop Barron to Libermann, 7th August 1844, and 3rd September 1844, N.D. V, pp. 64-67

Fr. Bessieux stayed for six months at Cape Palmas with Jean Fabé. The ship which was to transport the housing of the Bishop was delayed for three months. Finally, around the middle of September, Fr. Bessieux boarded the ship with Jean Fabé for Grand Bassam. Only on reaching there did they realise the disaster which had occurred. Several of the confreres were dead, with only Brother Gregory still there. This is how Brother Peter Mersy described the arrival of Bessieux:

"Someone came to tell poor Brother Gregory that Fr. Bessieux was anchored off shore. He immediately got two Black People to bring him out to the ship by canoe. He was in such a sorry state that he was unable to walk. The water at the harbour bar was so powerful that the boat capsized twice. Twice the Negros, who were experts in such a situation, fished him out of the water and put him back in the canoe. He was unconscious by the time they reached the ship, and had to be lifted aboard. When he returned to his senses, both of them, Bessieux and himself, fell into tears. Finally, their first emotions subsided. Fr. Bessieux told Gregory that he was going to send him back to France to do a novitiate, and that he would regain his strength there. As for himself, when the ship went back to Gabon, he would be on it. Brother Gregory said that he would go to Gabon, or anywhere else, with him, even if it meant his death. Fr. Bessieux did not insist on his idea and let matters lie at that."^{xliii}

So Fr. Bessieux did not prevent Gregory from continuing his mission with him. But Jean Fabé, who had accompanied him as far as Cape Palmas, had by now lost his reason. He immediately set sail for Europe, but unfortunately died while still at sea on his way home.^{xliv}

Now, Fr. Bessieux, who had been sent by Libermann as Superior of ten missionaries, seven priests and three laymen, found himself alone with one Brother.

^{xliii} Notes on Brother Gregory, December 1863, N. D. V, p.331

^{xliv} Cf. Henry KOREN - *Les Spiritains: trois siècles d'histoire religieuse et missionnaire*, Beauchesne, Paris, 1982, p. 210

Since they had not been instructed otherwise, the two of them continued their missionary work, even without the presence of the Vicar Apostolic. They left for Gabon. On their arrival, they occupied the house intended for Bishop Barron. *“The good Brother did the cooking, the washing, mending clothes, etc: the apostle went into the villages with a Negro who knew a little how to translate Pongwe into French.”*^{xlv}

Later, they gathered together some children, who ate and lived in the house, and the Brother taught them to read and to sew.

3.2 Peter Mersy on Haiti

Although Gregory was part of a missionary group on the African coast, on the other side of the Atlantic, on Haiti, Eugene TISSERANT had been working all alone, since November 1842.

Meanwhile, Libermann got together a new team to join the co-Founder of the new Society. They were Father Joseph LOSSEDAT and Brother Peter MERSY. They left for Haiti on 13th February 1844.

Unfortunately, this mission was not to last very long. Scarcely a year later, there were changes in the Secretariats of State for Justice, Public Instruction, and Religion. The result was that the situation became very anti Catholic, and the missionaries were forced to return to France.

On returning to La Neuville, they learned the alarming news about the group in Guinea. There was even official talk of the whole group being dead. Masses were therefore celebrated for the repose of their souls.

3.3 Peter Mersy is sent to Guinea.

In spite of the atmosphere of mourning, the return of Brother Peter from Haiti at least offered Fr. Libermann the chance to form a new missionary team for Guinea.

^{xlv} *Notes on Brother Gregory*, 1863, N.D. V, p.332

Peter Mersy was in temporary Vows. On his return from missionary experience in Haiti, and after staying some months in France, he made his Perpetual Vows on 11th June 1845. That was the very day of his new departure, this time for the African coast, together with Fathers Briot and Arragon.

3.4 Biographies of Peter and Gregory

Brother Peter, as we have indicated above, gave us certain biographical details concerning Brother Gregory. He also included his own story. Here is what he wrote about his friend:

“Dear, good and well beloved Brother Gregory was born in Bordeaux, I believe, around 1824 or 1825. I did not know his family. I got to know him two years before he left for the Missions. I struck up a friendship with him because I was attracted by his piety and love of God. We usually spoke about making pilgrimages to Jerusalem, Rome or even Compostella. On one occasion we were ready to go on one. But we could not decide which pilgrimage to make. We did not wish anybody to know about our idea, so we put it off until later. We then agreed to enter La Trappe. It would be wonderful to be Trappists. But we did not know how to get there. Was it in France? Or Spain? We had no idea. We were the subject of ridicule because we went to Holy Communion so often. If the other orphans had any idea that we wanted to be Trappists, they would have laughed us to scorn.

We were in Bordeaux when the venerable Bishop Luquet passed through as a simple missionary. A pious person introduced me to him before he left, and he was the first to talk to me about our dear Society. He wrote to our Venerable Father on my behalf. Since I was so friendly with Brother Gregory, I told him about it. That was in 1842, near the Feast of All Saints. We redoubled our fervour until in September 1843, Frs. Bessieux, Maurice, Audebert, Bouchet, etc., and all the other missionaries of the Holy Heart of Mary passed through Bordeaux to get a ship for Cape Palmas. The same good person as before told me about them. We both presented ourselves to Fr. Bessieux. He examined us, and preferred to take my companion with him since he was two years older. He prom-

ised me that he would write to our Venerable Father in order to get me accepted for the novitiate."^{xlvi}

It appears that this testimony of Peter was written in 1863, in other words, twenty years after the first group left for Guinea. Brother Peter then wrote about the trials undergone by his confreres.

"My dear Fathers and good Brother Gregory set sail on 29th September, the Feast of the Archangel Michael, and arrived at Cape Palmas on 30th November 1843, the Feast of St. Andrew the Apostle. Poor Brother Gregory had plenty to suffer on the voyage, because he was often seasick and the food was bad: he ate the same rations as the sailors.

On arriving at Cape Palmas, they found a priest, who was either English or Irish, and a young man of the same nationality^{xlvi}. At Cape Palmas, it was terrible for our dear Fathers and Mission founders. They only had rice for food, and it was cooked in a large pot by the young Englishman. It was as hard as stale bread, and since there was not enough for everyone, poor Father de Régnier was often undernourished. The others ate it but with evident distaste. Our dear Brother Gregory was often reduced to eating what was left at the bottom of the pot. It was like a kind of burnt crust, as he often told me. Then the young Englishman died, and the English or Irish priest was so disheartened that he left immediately for England.

Brother Gregory became the cook."^{xlvi}

3.5 Peter meets Gregory again at Goree

Brother Peter Mersy encountered the same difficulties as the apostles of the Society of the Most Holy Heart of Mary, when he finally arrived in Guinea. Let us read the passage in which Peter describes his voyage out to Africa, still not knowing whether he would find Gregory alive or dead:

^{xlvi} *Notes on Brother Gregory*, 1863, N.D. V, pp.328-329.

^{xlvi} (sic)

^{xlvi} *Notes on Brother Gregory*, 1863, N.D. V, p.329

“Three months after our return from Santo Domingo (Haiti), we arrived at Goree. There were three of us: Fr. Briot, Fr. Arragon and myself. We left our loads still on board and went through the streets of Goree trying to find out if any of our confreres were still alive. The Commander in Goree told us he had no news to give us about them. A trader informed us that there was a priest in Gabon with a young man called Gregory. We were so happy to hear that! Soon afterwards, a Government ship set sail for Gabon, bringing a large packet of letters for the good priest and the dear Brother. Our Venerable Father had given them to us in case they were still alive. All our boxes and provisions were opened to share our provisions with them. Three weeks later, the ship entered the Gabon river, at ten o’ clock at night. The captain, with a delicacy which cannot be too highly praised, sent up the letters to Fr. Bessieux who was not yet in bed, although it was eleven o’ clock by that time. This good priest woke up his companion and they both went to the chapel to read the letters on their knees in front of the Blessed Sacrament. How they wept with tears of joy! They had received no news about France or about the Congregation for two years. They thought the Society had been dissolved, and now according to what they read it was flourishing. In addition to that, new confreres had arrived to help them. They began to sing the Magnificat out of gratitude to God. It was midnight by then. No matter. They spent the rest of the night talking about these wonderful events. Next morning, they offered their Mass and Communion in thanksgiving.

A few months later, Fr. Briot was able to pay them an unexpected visit. He stayed a month with Fr. Bessieux and Brother Gregory. The poor Brother, realising that the Mission was taking a turn for the better, asked permission to make a short novitiate either in France or in Goree. This was agreed. So he came to Goree with Fr. Briot, arriving near the beginning of 1846. At first I found it hard to recognise him. He was almost black. A large straw hat covered his head. He was wearing some kind of soutane which was neither blue nor black. It was of the kind of English cloth used for making jeans. He was extremely happy to see me. So much so that he said that although he had decided to return to France for his novitiate, he would make it in Goree so as to remain near me.”^{xlix}

^{xlix} *Notes on Brother Gregory, 1863, N.D. V, pp.333-334.*

Part 4. Towards a more structured Organisation

We have just been studying certain historical facts which took place during the first years of the missionary Society of the Most Holy Heart of Mary. We have seen how laymen took part in the missionary adventure with the priests, without having done a novitiate! Basing ourselves now on the writings of Brother Peter Mersy, we now propose to describe the conditions under which the first novitiates for the Brothers took place.

4.1 The First Novitiate

Peter was the first Brother to be professed in the missionary Society of the Holy Heart of Mary¹.

"I have never heard it said that any other Brother came to La Neuville before me, whether as postulant or novice. I therefore believe that I was the first postulant^{li}, novice, and professed member.

I made my vows for three years on 13th February 1844, after two months of postulancy and novitiate, in the little room of our Venerable Father, underneath the pigeon loft. I was alone with the good Father, in front of a small crucifix placed on the table. At that historic moment, nothing was written down. He said the words of the vows and I repeated them loudly after him. Then he embraced me, as happens publicly nowadays at such a ceremony. Then we went down to the little chapel, which was only a room in which everybody was waiting before taking their departure.

¹ This is confirmed in the Register of the first members admitted to the Novitiate: Cf. *Les premiers membres*, N.D. III, pp. 401 seq.

So Peter was the first Brother to take his Temporary Vows in the Society, in February 1844. We should remember however that before Peter, our Venerable Father had received Gregory into the Society in 1843, just a few weeks before he left for Guinea. Libermann had also welcomed other candidates to the vocation of Brother even if they did not eventually take vows. Cf. Letter to Fr. Caron, 28th April 1840, N. D. II, p.81.

^{li} Libermann had other postulants before Peter Mersy. Cf. Letter of Libermann to M. Halé, 5th October 1841, N. D. III, p. 30.

This is what happened on the first occasion I saw such an event. The altar was decorated with every costly thing at our disposal. The Blessed Sacrament was exposed in a monstrance on the altar, in the midst of whatever candles our poor situation could afford. The chandeliers in the room were also lit up. We chanted Lauda Jerusalem, Pange Lingua, the prayer Deus qui nobis and then the prayer for departing missionaries. The priest who was making his Consecration to the Apostolate, said the words on his knees in front of the altar, and then it was my turn to do the same. When that was finished, we spent some time in profound adoration. Our Venerable Father then embraced the two of us, and we went round the chapel embracing everyone else who was there. When we returned to our places, our Venerable Father gave the Benediction. We left immediately. We were on our way while our dear confreres were chanting Ecce quam bonus in the chapel. So, dear Father, that is the first mission departure which I had ever witnessed, and that is how I took my first vows for three years.”^{lii}

That all took place before his departure for the Mission of Haiti. Now we shall see how he described his perpetual religious profession.

“A year later, having returned from Santo Domingo (Haiti), I took my Perpetual Vows in public together with Brother Fulgence^{liii}. The altar had been adorned as for a great solemnity. Our Venerable Father got us to kneel on the altar step, and there, with him between us wearing a surplice, and with the tabernacle open, as we still do today, we pronounced our Perpetual Vows. I was first, and then my confrere Fulgence. When we had finished, the good Father said that he received our vows with great happiness. He gave us a little sermon, then embraced us. He was followed by our Fathers, then the priests, deacons and subdeacons. The others present did not come forward. Needless to say the Brothers did

^{lii} Note of Brother Peter Mersy, 23rd March 1862, N. D. V, pp.324-325

^{liii} Brother Fulgence DINJON, was born at Bellancourt, in the diocese of Amiens, on 13th February 1819. He entered the Novitiate on 21st May 1844. Cf. *Les premiers membres*, N. D. III, p. 404.

not come forward either for we were the first: the others were only postulants. That all took place on 11th June 1845. I left the very same day for Africa."^{liv}

4.2 Private Vows

We must understand that in the era we are describing, vows were not obligatory^{lv}, nor was there any Rule of Life for the Brothers. The recent Regulations were contained in the Provisional Rule of 1840. This allowed those who wished to take private vows. Even when vows were made, they were of no concern to the other members of the Society. The same Rule said, *"The vows are to be made without the knowledge of the other missionaries, and the secret must be maintained throughout one's life."*^{lvi}

Such discretion was imposed in order to prevent cliques forming in the Society. This is how it is explained in a gloss written by Fr. Lanurien:

"It is important for secrecy regarding those who have or who have not taken vows. For example, it is possible that missionaries entertain suspicions that some people are not very highly regarded because they have not taken vows, or that such people^{lvii} should not be elevated to high office, or that such people must be treated differently from those in vows."^{lviii}

^{liv} *Note of Brother Peter Mersy, 23rd March 1862, N. D. V, p. 325..*

^{lv} What was necessary for all the members of the Society was Consecration to the Most Holy Heart of Mary. This can be seen from Chapter VII of the Fourth Part of the Provisional Rule. This Consecration was to be taken even by those in Religious Vows.

^{lvi} Provisional Rule, art. IV, no. 3, N. D. II, p.260.

^{lvii} (sic)

^{lviii} François NICOLAS - *Règle Provisoire des missionnaires de Libermann*, Pro manuscrito, Mortain, 1967, p.60.

We remember that the laymen who went in the first missionary group to Guinea, had not made vows. This did not prevent them entering wholeheartedly into their apostolic community as described by Fr. Bessieux:

“In the early years, they had not made any religious commitment. However, they joined us in all our spiritual exercises, got up early as we did, made their meditation, assisted at Holy Mass, spiritual reading and Rosary, and went to the Sacrament of Reconciliation every week. They ate the same food as we did and at the same table.

A little later, they wore the habit on Sundays, and we found it easy to give them the title of Brother. Our love for them and their love for us was worthy of the name, and was more in keeping with the ties which bound us together.”^{lix}

Unfortunately, among the laymen who left for Africa with Fr. Bessieux, only Gregory SIXTE actually lived the rest of his life as a Brother in the Society. Jean Fabé died “in harness”, and Andrew left the Society as soon as he returned to France^{lx}.

4.3 The Founder

The first novitiate for Brothers opened in December 1843, at La Neuville, and lasted scarcely two months.^{lxi} Libermann was the Novice Master.

As we have seen, our Venerable Father founded the Work for the Blacks in constant dialogue with his colleague Le Vasseur. In November 1844, he wrote a letter to him in Reunion, in which he gave his impressions of the atmosphere in the house of formation which welcomed candidates who wished to be priests or Brothers. *“There are a lot of people in our*

^{lix} *Various Notes - The Missionary Brothers - Note of Bishop Bessieux, 16th June 1862, N. D. V, p. 323*

^{lx} On returning to France, Andrew became a gardener in the Major Seminary of Bordeaux.

Cf. Note 2, N. D. V, p.249

community. We have seven people who are going to make their Consecration to the Apostolate very soon. They are all priests, or soon will be. (...) In addition we have eight Brothers."^{lxii}

Although from the beginning of his Work for the Black People, Libermann thought about preparing certain laymen to be sent to the missions, the formation to be given was not as yet very well structured. Our Venerable Father understood the importance of Brothers for missionary work^{lxiii}, and he looked for ways to integrate them into the missionary Society of the Most Holy Heart of Mary. That is why he took the resolution to compose a Rule for Brothers at the end of 1844. In the end, this Rule only saw the light of day after the fusion of his Society with the Seminary of the Holy Spirit. Its title was, "*Rules of the Brothers of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit and the Immaculate Heart of Mary*". It was published in 1851, a document thirty pages long^{lxiv}

From all that we have just said, it is clear that Libermann was the founder of the Brothers in the Congregation. That at least was the opinion of Fr. Bessieux:

"What was the origin of the first Brothers in the Congregation? Who was the first to think of the idea and how did he promote it?"

The introduction of the first Brothers was not achieved by the missionaries leaving for Africa from Bordeaux in 1843. It was simply the realisation

^{lxi} Cf. *Note of Brother Peter Mersy*, 23rd March 1862, N. D. V, p. 325

^{lxii} Letter of Libermann to Le Vasseur, 14th November 1844, N. D. VI, p. 425.

^{lxiii} From the time of the foundation of the Society, Libermann was conscious that he had to open a road for the integration of Brothers. Cf. Letter to Fr. Caron, 28th April 1840, N. D. II, p. 81; also Letter to Germainville, of 1st November 1843, N. D. IV, p. 416.

In a letter to the Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda Fide, 28th March 1844, Libermann defends his sending of a certain number of Brothers for the mission of Haiti with a view to opening a school. Cf. N. D. VI, p. 135. In another letter addressed to Mother Javouhey, 22nd July 1844, Libermann equally expresses his conviction that priests should be accompanied by Brothers who would open a school and teach various trades to the indigenous people; Cf. N. D. VI, p. 275.

^{lxiv} Cf. N. D. XI, pp. 487 - 517.

of a project conceived by our Venerable Father, and carried out willingly by him. This is easily understood when we read the letters Libermann wrote to a young cooper from Bordeaux, who had shown the desire, through the mediation of, I believe, Mr. Germainville, to accompany us to Africa, in order to help the missionaries. ^{lxv}

Conclusion

As Fr. Bessieux stated, Libermann was the founder of the Spiritan Brothers. He is the one who, in his capacity as Superior General, judged it necessary to welcome them into the Society of the Most Holy Heart of Mary, and later, into the Congregation of the Holy Spirit under the Protection of the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

In this little study, we have seen how the courage of the first missionaries, especially those in Guinea, was a fundamental element in the foundation of the work of Brothers in the Congregation. The bravery of Gregory has been well described by Peter Mersy. How is it that Gregory did not become discouraged when faced with such sufferings? He it is, surely, who has left up until today one of the most beautiful testimonies regarding the apostolic life of a Spiritan Brother. He lived the Rule of Life even before knowing of its existence.

Libermann listened to Le Vavas seur and Bishop Barron when they asked for Brothers. The status of a Brother in the missionary Society and in the Congregation became more and more precise as time went by. The first laymen left for the Missions, moved by the power of their own personal passion for evangelisation. They had the benefit of only a few weeks or months of formation. And only as and when it was possible, did these lay people make their novitiate, and pronounce their vows and Consecration to the Most Holy Heart of Mary. They became members of a single Congregation, made up of priests and Brothers.

^{lxv} *Different Notes - The Missionary Brothers - Note of Bishop Bessieux, 16th June 1862, N. D. V, p. 322*

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Carmo Gomes
Mission de Bajob
March 2008

MY PERSONAL EXPERIENCES IN THE SPIRITAN CONGREGATION AS A BROTHER.

Joseph Mba C.S.Sp.

Joseph Mba, who belongs to the Province of Nigeria shares with us in this article what motivated and inspired him to become a brother in the Congregation. He also shares the number of roles that he has been involved in the Congregation.

I was born in the Royal family of Chief and Lolo Paul Mbachukwu Nwaobula of Umueze-Uhueze in Nenwe Aninri Local Government Area of Enugu State - Nigeria on 1st Jan, 1960. First Profession 1981. Final Profession 1991.

A child in the womb, they say, belongs to one person, but when born belongs to every one. I grew up with my other age mates, not knowing what God has in store for me. I became very interested in the activities of the church such as the Block Rosary crusade and choir. In the long run, this led me into the Holy Ghost Juniorate. Later I came across a Seminarian who was doing his apostolic work in my town, now Fr. Mike Onwuemelie; his missionary activities greatly inspired me and highlighted my vocation. Later, I met Brother Linus Ugwu during my Postulancy. I greeted him, "Good morning father", because he was dressed the same as the fathers and was too old to be a seminarian. Then, he responded but later called me and told me that he is neither a priest nor a seminarian but a Holy Ghost Brother. We had a long conversation with a lot of questions and answers and then I understood that the Holy Ghost Congregation has Brothers among them, after which I became interested in the brotherhood. He also encouraged me to become a Brother and I thank God for him, because I am happy to be one of them.

At the novitiate, the Novice master made it clear to us that one is a member of the Spiritan Congregation by virtue of his temporary and perpetual vows and not by Ordination. He said that even if a bishop or priest

wants to join the Congregation, he must do the Novitiate and be professed taking vows. This confirmed my discussion with Brother Linus, and I became more certain about my vocation to brotherhood. In 1981, I made my first profession and in 1991, I made my perpetual profession by the grace of God.

Meanwhile, the road to this destination wasn't an easy one. My father being a traditional ruler of my town would not allow his expected successor and his only son to join Religious life, and my mother had the same feeling, so it wasn't easy for her to accept it. A lot of meetings were held and several promises were made, all in an effort to discourage me but when it was clear that I could not do as they wished, they left me alone and finally my mother accepted it and became a Catholic. Much later my father also joined the Catholic Church. I am happy indeed, that they were alive and received all the blessings of the Lord before they departed to eternal rest.

However, one may be tempted to ask, given the opportunities I had, why did I choose to be a Brother? Simply, it is indeed my "Call", a vocation that makes me happy, a vocation that brings me closer to the poor and needy.

Brothers could be useful in many areas such as counseling, technical work, hospital services, teaching and lots more. These areas did not need one to be ordained before he could do them; therefore, this called for the urgent revitalization of the vocation to Spiritan Brotherhood.

In some provinces, Brothers in our Congregation suffer a lot of discrimination from both priest and lay people, for instance, a popular saying "if father is eating let him remember brother" simply described the impression they have about brotherhood, meaning Fathers must eat to their satisfaction before Brothers can eat if there is food left over.

Many priests will ask you, why don't you go for the priesthood? And the lay faithful will ask you, when are you going to be ordained? This shows that some of our Priests, Seminarians and lay people don't even understand the vocation of the brotherhood. These kinds of attitudes will not in any way encourage young people to join the brotherhood and should be discouraged. I will ever remain grateful to God for my vocation to brotherhood in the Congregation.

I thank God and our Congregation for the opportunities given to me to serve in the following capacities. These areas include:

Bursar Spiritan School of Philosophy, Isienu - Nsuka, Spiritan Farm manager, Assistant Provincial Bursar, Provincial Councillor, Regional Councillor, Spiritan Construction and Design W.A Ltd and Foundation for Training of Rural Youths.

The following building projects I was involved in are witnesses to my construction skill:

- Spiritan International School of Theology (SIST), Enugu State – Nigeria.
- Spiritan Retreat Center, Akabor, Imo State – Nigeria.
- Spiritan House of Welcome Onitsha, Anambra State – Nigeria.
- Holy Ghost Novitiate Chapel, Awomama, Imo State – Nigeria
- Holy Ghost Provincialate, Abuja - Nigeria.
- Spiritan Novitiate and Philosophy Ejisu – Ghana.

Looking at the works ahead in the areas of our apostolate and the need for integral development of human persons, there is urgent need for more promotion and recruitment of Spiritan brothers. We should make every effort to give life again to this branch of the tree that is dying. It is our collective responsibility and should be treated as an emergency in our Congregation. I suggest that Formators should make known to young people in formation that one is a member of the Spiritan Congregation by virtue of his temporary and perpetual vows and not by ordination, and encourage some to join the brotherhood.

There should exist a very cordial relationship among priests and brothers in our various communities. This will also encourage young people to embrace the vocation to Spiritan Brothers. Indeed an atmosphere void of discrimination will go a long way in promoting the image of brotherhood in the Congregation.

Finally, my prayer is that God will continue to keep us together as a family and increase vocations of brothers and priests in our Congregation. For, the Harvest is plenty but the Labourers are few.

A SPIRITAN BROTHER AT THE SERVICE OF MISSION

Jean Claude Kibinda

My name is Jean Claude Kibinda Maloko and I come from Congo Brazzaville; I just celebrated my forty-seventh birthday on the seventh of January this year. I did my primary and secondary schooling at Pointe Noire and Dolisie. After secondary school I trained as a domestic electrician at Dolisie. My contact with the Spiritans began in 1982 when I was a member of the choir at Our Lady of Fatima's Church in Dolisie. I was attracted by the community life of the Spiritan fathers in the parish there. Getting to know something of the history of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit drew me immediately to the choice of becoming a religious brother, something I considered to be a real witness to missionary dynamism at the service of the Church. After doing two years as an aspirant, I was sent by Fr. Joseph Wollenschneider, superior in the Congo district, to Impfondo for an experience of community life in the parish of St. Paul, where the parish priest was Fr. Jean Gardin, the present Prefect Apostolic of Likouala. For one year I worked part-time as an electrician with a Brazilian company called Andrade Guiterrez which was constructing the Ongou-Epéna road, and in the afternoons I was involved in pastoral activities such as the choir, teaching catechism, and preparing liturgies. It was for me a true beginning in the apostolic life as envisaged by Fr. Libermann. After this experience I was admitted into the novitiate at Mbalmayo where I stayed for two years, from 1985 to 1987: one preparatory year and one year of novitiate. I took my first vows on the 8th of September 1987.

After novitiate I was sent to the district of Cameroon, to Yagoua to be exact, in the extreme north, for a missionary experience in the Spiritan community of the cathedral of the diocese. In the community we were four in number, Gérard Sireau being the parish priest and superior. I was responsible for the youth (action Catholique and catechetical groups) and worked in the promotion of rural agricultural methods in the villages around Yagoua, after having followed a course run by a Spanish agron-

omist who was coming to the end of his stay in Cameroon. This work in the agricultural sector was a very enriching time for me from the pastoral and community aspect. I learnt a lot from the farmers in the three years I spent in this region in the extreme north where there is a dry season of nine months and a rainy season of three months; the people were disadvantaged on many levels but very welcoming nonetheless. Millet is the main crop and the staple food; there is widespread cattle-raising, market-gardening and cultivation of rice during the dry season.

My situation as a brother was not well understood despite all my efforts at an explanation, for the Christians never saw me celebrating Mass or administering the sacraments. However, they were happy with what I was doing. Not being able to articulate well my first name, Jean-Claude, they gave me the nickname “Sans Culotte” and that stayed with me all the time I was with them. I worked a lot with the Massa people and my only regret was that I was not able to learn their language, which was, in effect, quite difficult to learn. Our community life revolved around our meetings and prayer times, as we had to do an assessment of our respective activities. We got on very well with the Spiritan Sisters who were our neighbours and who took part in some pastoral and parish activities with us.

From Yagoua, I was appointed to the Centre for Vocational Animation at Yaoundé by Fr. Daniel Henry, the then superior of the district of Yaoundé, to replace Fr. Nicolas Gobina who had been transferred to Libreville. I lived in community with Fathers Jean Paul Le Borgne and Pierre Schmidt who was in charge of the parish of St. Pierre de Kong; in my second year there after Fr. J.P. Le Borgne left, I was with Fr. Gérard Farquet. My main work was with aspirants to the Spiritan life and I also gave a hand at teaching catechism in the parish. I organized a meeting once a month for the aspirants to teach them about the congregation and there was an annual meeting on the religious and missionary life. The number of aspirants varied between fifty and sixty. There were also monthly meetings, initiated by Fr. Nicolas Gobina, – called “Vocational Mornings”- for all the aspirants to male and female religious Congregations present in Yaoundé to reflect on the religious life and the life of the Church. The two years I spent in the Centre (1990 to 1992) were for me

another rich experience of missionary life. I was in the first group of the ITPR – The Institute of Pastoral Theology for Religious. Even for the aspirants I was involved with, I met the same kind of questions regarding the brother's vocation: "What is the place of the brother in the Congregation and the Church?"

After this experience accompanying young people in Yaoundé, I was asked by the superiors to help the young people in the novitiate as sub-novice master, with Fr. Etienne Osty as novice master and Fr. Jacques de Laville as bursar. For one year, Fr. Etienne asked me to give some courses on religious life and also to give spiritual direction to some of the novices. For me it was like a second novitiate, because in forming the novices I was forming myself. Then, at the end of this year I was asked to do a course in formation for novice masters and novice mistresses at Chevilly Larue in France. So, I stayed in France doing this course from 1993 to 1994 and I lived in community with the philosophers in the Province of France, whose superior was Fr. Philippe Rivals. As well as the courses I followed, I prepared children for reception of the sacraments in a nearby college. Through this course I deepened my knowledge of the religious life and vocational discernment and the need for listening and accompanying young people in their formation. At the end of this year I went back to Mbalmayo at the request of my superiors, as sub-novice master and bursar from 1994 to 2001. I took up the same activities: bursar (after Fr. Jacques De Laville left), spiritual accompaniment and courses on the religious life. In 1996 Fr. Etienne Osty was recalled to France and Fr. Yves Nzoussi became the new novice master. During my time at the novitiate I was on the Central African Foundation council representing the brothers. In 1999 Fr. Yves was sent to do further studies and Fr. Raymond Jung came as novice master. This means that during my time as a formator in the novitiate I had to work with three different novice masters. This was a great richness for me on several levels. Being a formator in the novitiate is very demanding because you have to keep to the novices' daily rhythm; this also means you yourself have to be an example at manual labour, animal husbandry and gardening. Misunderstandings and difficulties are not lacking but prayer can help to overcome these. With help from friends, above all in Europe, we were able con-

struct a piggery, a chicken run, ten extra rooms for the novices and a chapel. All the time I was in the novitiate our neighbours took me for a novice, not understanding my status as a religious brother and they made fun of me thinking that I was repeating the novitiate every year. This did not worry me or give me any complexes because there had been other brothers before me and I felt that persevering in this witness as a brother could prove to them the importance of such an option. I did not feel uncomfortable in any way with my priest – confreres. After this very rich experience in the novitiate, Fr. Azegue, Provincial superior at the time, asked me to go to Douala; I accepted this proposal with a heavy heart, so much had the love of the formation of the young confreres become a part of me.

On the 5th of January 2001, I arrived at the Mission Procure in Douala together with Fr. Raymond Jung; my time there was a little difficult, most of all because of the heat of Douala. Once again I started learning new things, this time from Fr. Joachim Abellan who was the procurator and community superior. Among other things, I was put in charge of buying air tickets for all the priests and religious of Douala archdiocese and the whole central African sub-region. At the same time I did a course in English organized by the British Council and three months later an evening course in computers run by the de La Salle Brothers in their college. During the day, Fr Joachim Abellan taught me about book-keeping, basing himself on the financial services of the Procure, where many clients used to deposit or withdraw their money. Even though I had been the bursar in the novitiate for a long time, I had to keep very accurate records so as to avoid any shortfall of cash in the various accounts held. In April 2002 the Provincial Council proposed that I go to Rome to do a one month course in accounting, and this helped me a lot in getting to know more about keeping accounts and managing money. I continued to work at the Procure when I returned to Douala. We were four in the community and we shared community life with the confreres of the Provincial team, as we still do today. In July 2002 Fr. Abellan was appointed to the French Seminary in Rome and the out-going Provincial Council at the time (it was the year when Fr. Lambert Ndjana was elected Provincial) asked me to take over the job of Procurator, which I did so reluctantly. I asked for someone to help me in the job but because of lack of personnel, the

Provincial Council gave me an Indian *co-opérant* sent by FIDESCO France who was an accountant. We worked together for two years. When this man left, the Superiors sent the late Fr. Eric Achille to help me and he combined this with being the assistant Provincial bursar and later Provincial bursar. We worked together for three years and then I asked Brother Jean-Baptiste Essomba to come and help me because I could not do the work by myself. We were offering a wide service to the local Church and to the sub-region, so two people were needed for a task that was sometimes quite delicate. Through our financial, accommodation and travel services we provided a valuable service to the local Churches and certain lay organizations as well. It was a commitment of the whole community. At the moment we are an international community of four – one from Congo-Brazzaville, two from Cameroun and one from Netherlands, plus a young confrere on placement from Gabon. Our daily life revolves around our prayer in common, meals, meetings, sharing about our work and mutual support in our various responsibilities. We also accommodate confreres who come to Douala for one reason or another.

I still say to be a Procurator and to deal with confreres and clients at the same time is not an easy task. It requires tact on a relational level because the need to be efficient could make us forget what is essential to our religious life, which is service to others while taking into account their different characters. Being in the Procure you need to be able to listen, to be patient and attentive, and to be up to date and accurate especially when dealing with other peoples' money. I am always aware of the possibility of making a mistake and that means I have to concentrate on the work at hand and always be punctual and available. What I appreciate is the immense number of congregations which ask for our help in making financial transactions and the confidence they have in us. My vocation as a brother is better accepted here than elsewhere because there are three of us brothers in the community, even though some people are still confused and address me as "Father" rather than "Brother". This does not worry me but gives me the chance to explain what it means for me to be a Spiritan brother – it is not like being a second class citizen, but it is the expression of a deliberate choice of a special way of being a Spiritan religious.

NRJ (=‘Energy’) Centre Madagascar – August 1991 to August 2006

I came to the NRJ centre at the request of the superiors of the Districts of Madagascar and Mauritius, where I was living since 1986.

Vincent Chopard had set up a drop-in centre in the capital city for teenagers in difficulty at the end of 1987. From six to seven in the beginning, the number rapidly rose to about forty a year and a half later. Vincent asked for help from his confreres; those in Madagascar could not easily free themselves from their work so he sent out an appeal to the other districts of the Indian Ocean.

I arrived at the NRJ centre on the 20th of August 1991. My first impressions will always remain with me even though I had visited Vincent and the youths the previous year. The centre is cramped but right in the middle of the neighbourhood; it is full of lively young people. The little streets and houses roundabout are dirty and unkempt, except for a few buildings. The meals in the centre are simple, one could say almost frugal, but all is movement, noise, shouting, singing and smiling – an impressive sign of vitality! I finally ‘fell’ for this world of restless youths whom I found to be friendly and welcoming.

During my first days there I visited the surrounding area with some of the youths and I joined in their games, especially basketball, and went with them a few times to a show – they really love singing!

For those who wanted it, I offered some classes in French and English. I spent a lot of time at this using a simple method and with the help of one youth who was quite good at French and who also taught me some Malgache. In such a situation I did feel a little frustrated and a bit like a child, not knowing anything of the Malgache culture. I used to help the youths a little in their garden. My life was thus balanced between community prayer, meals, learning Malgache and visiting Foyer Laval each week.

As time went on I began to get involved in other activities: teaching catechism in the French secondary school, setting up an education pro-

gramme adapted for street children, visiting the farm 25 kilometres outside Antananarivo and jogging on Sundays with some ex-patriate friends.

But my most important work was looking after the daily needs of our neighbours and being present all the time to the youths, day and night, the whole week long.

There were many visitors and I often had to entertain them, but such contacts were very valuable for us and the young people and for the visitors themselves. I could not get away from a lot of different meetings here and there.

Briefly, during my fifteen years there, many people passed through the centre, there was a lot of building, moving rooms, health problems, changes of confreres and teams – especially in the latter years. When I left Madagascar on the 14th of August 2006, I took with me many memories of the people, our friends and our neighbours.

When I think over these life experiences two or three reflections come to mind.

I was welcoming many visitors, but above all young people and our close neighbours, informally, on a daily basis and on special occasions like feasts, visits and important meetings. It was time consuming and required availability and flexibility, and though enriching in some ways, could be the occasion for misunderstandings or problems; but they were moments for a deeper encounter with people.

Slowly and with difficulty I became a ‘go-between’ passing among groups and people who only met each other rarely and from afar. I thought of the young pupils from the French secondary school who spent half a day with the youths in the centre; my jogging friends of different nationalities running on the mounds that encircled the neighbourhood. I thought of my friends and relatives who had visited as well – my niece and friend who lived for four months at the NRJ centre, and many others who were curious, irritated, enthusiastic, happy...

It seemed to me that an essential dimension was the witness my confreres were giving of their lives in the service of others and of God. We had prayer together, shared our resources, experienced friendship and mutual respect; this is a “witness” carried out in the long term and in simple, everyday things.

I think there is no specific spirituality for brothers. I believe I lived these years as a Spiritan, in imitation of John the Baptist, of Joseph and Mary— the prophet, the humble servant and the one who kept all these things in her heart. But above all, with Christ as our true model.

BROTHER OLIVER DOWLING

The following is a letter in response to a questionnaire sent out around the Congregation asking questions about how we might promote the vocation of brother in the Congregation. In it we can appreciate the deep faith and balanced views of a man now great in years who gave the best years of his life working in Kimmage making sure that everybody had enough to eat in the days when vocations were very numerous indeed.

17.01.07

Dear Fr Kingston,

Thank you for your letter, inst. I found it interesting and encouraging although I do not agree fully with all its contents. My negative attitude is influenced by the liberal outlook of society in Ireland today, its materialism, consumerism and the general prosperity that is so evident. Of course there are many good people but I fear few young people would be attracted to the life of a CSSp Brother. There is so much freedom, so much choice it is difficult to see young people attracted to restrictions of religious life. On the other hand, there are some who seem to feel the need for peace and quiet, their lifestyle is not always fulfilling.

Now to make some comments: It is true that we Brothers have, in general, made a fair contribution to the work of the Congregation. Many were indeed holy men. It is true that prior to Vatican II we had some legitimate grievances but, by and large, we knew what we were taking on and were content with our lot and aware of what we had to offer both spiritually and materially.

To the best of my knowledge, Père des Places founded a clerical group, The Holy Ghost Fathers, and later Fr. Libermann founded his

group and it was Fr. Libermann who introduced the Brothers mainly, I think, to keep the priests in their work of evangelisation. It was with this idea in mind that many joined as Brothers in the early and middle of the last century. They did not aspire to administrative or High Office.

Brothers, as we know them in clerical institutions, had their origin, I think, in the Cistercian Order of Monks. St. Bernard joined the Cistercians and encouraged many of his relations (noblemen) to join also. He looked at his own home and saw the peasants who worked there and he decided to give them the opportunity to become monks and work in the monastery. He called them Brothers.

I fully understand that times have changed and changed very much (too much perhaps) and we have to adapt to the new outlook. I would not like to see the clerical aspect diluted unduly. Perhaps it has already gone too far and a Church without priests, a clerical body, would not be the Church founded by Jesus Christ. Of course Brothers will always have a place in the Congregation and in the mind of Fr. Libermann to assist the priest – not to branch out into a separate grouping. I must remind you that in the early 1950s, the Irish Province made a very big effort to recruit and train young men to become Brothers. Many very fine young men joined and were given an excellent training but somehow few stayed. Some thoughtful confreres have said they were not given the opportunities to exercise their skills and talents and it was a time when there were openings for well-trained men. We did meet some of them at the Golden Jubilee celebrations in the June celebrations in Ardbraccan. They did become good laymen, appreciated the training they received.

As I have said, I do not see an opening for Holy Ghost Brothers in the Irish scene. Some say a new form of consecrated life may develop to meet the many needs of today's troubled society.

It is most likely Brothers will have a place in the New Provinces and find fulfilment as we did in the old Provinces.

In conclusion, I wonder has the rather disappointing manner in which some of our priests dress themselves have its origin in the downgrading

of their clerical status. I suggested it is in the manner in which we live our lives and present ourselves that will best present the gospel message. We need to avoid carelessness in our personal life and on the other hand a show of wealth is equally unacceptable. A happy medium between abundance and want.

I regret I was unable to respond by the 31st January. I am not sure my ideas will be of much value. I am probably out of date and I know you make allowance for my advanced age.

Sincerely in CSSp,

Br. Oliver CSSp.
Kimmage Manor,
Dublin 12

BEING A BROTHER IN A CLERICAL MISSIONARY CONGREGATION

Brother Javier Blanco, CSSp.

There are many years and situations that separate us from our founders, but in my opinion, the spirit they wished to disseminate was foreseeable from the beginning. In the Holy Spirit Seminary, Poullart des Places received three employees – a cook, a shoemaker and a tailor – for whom working standards and living allowances were prepared in accordance with the proper environment for a formation centre of clergymen. In the Work for the Blacks it was Le Vavasseur who early on, drew the profile of what would later become the brother in the Congregation, a task that Libermann had already begun to prepare, through a consultation with confreres.

It is in taking as a point of departure these beginnings of the Congregation and my own experience of life as a member of it, that I want to share my personal witness as a Spiritan Brother, convinced as I am that the services I have rendered during my fifty five years of consecration in a religious institute like ours, responds to the aspirations which have always been my own for my full human development as a missionary.

It was during the Marian Year of 1954, when, with all my enthusiasm, I entered the Brothers' Novitiate in Fraião, Braga, in Portugal. My formative years included the postulancy, the novitiate, my first profession and my eventual appointment to missionary animation work in Madrid.

In 1965, the establishment of the Missionary Animation Centre of Barcelona was entrusted to me and two other confreres (priests). I was tending to all the material aspects of the community: purchases, kitchen, clothes, etc. Later, with the development of the Centre, I was committed full time to missionary animation and to administration, also contributing to the foundation of the formation house, that is, the Seminary of San Cugat, in Barcelona.

At that time, the Province of Spain was established and it was then that I was appointed Provincial Bursar, bringing about my change to Madrid. A house was being built in Castrillo de la Vega - Aranda del Duero, in Burgos, and I was to oversee these works. Once the construction was completed, the novitiate was set up in it and I accepted the post of bursar of the new community. Later I was nominated Superior and bursar of the same community, until the rehabilitation centre began to operate.

A few years passed and a new mission was confided to me: Director and Bursar of the residence of non-Spiritan students, which operated in the San Cugat del Vallés Seminary, in Barcelona.

Throughout these years, I was member of the Provincial Council for several mandates.

A new stage

With more than 30 years of service, several in the Province of Spain, I was granted a special year to take an intensive course in missiology which, together with another course in catechetics, was of great benefit to me when I eventually left for mission 'ad extra'.

I went with great enthusiasm, but also with some concern - being 50 years of age, what could I do in the missions...? I was given the chance to get to know our missions in Tefé, Amazónia, and Paraguay. Paraguay ended up being my vocation.

Several months after my arrival, the International Spiritan Group of Paraguay celebrated its first chapter and I was elected bursar of the Group. This meant that after a small course in the Guaraní language, and many months in the mission in Lima, in the diocese of San Pedro, I had to return to the capital, Asunción, for a new task. The job left me some free time to join in youth ministry in the Spiritan Parish of Mariano Roque Alonso, near Asunción; it was the kind of work I was already involved in while at Lima.

Some of the youth who took part in youth ministry had enquired about entering the Congregation, so I was mandated to open a small novitiate in a house rented from a Congregation of Religious Sisters. Later the new Libermann Novitiate was established, and I became responsible for formation.

At the second Chapter of the Group I was elected Superior and re-elected three years later.

I have to say that the whole time I was in Paraguay was rich and full of surprises, but what gave me particular joy was receiving the first Paraguayan members into the Congregation.

As representative of the Group of Paraguay, I was given the opportunity to participate in the Enlarged General Council of Dakar, Senegal, in 1995 and in the General Chapter of 1998 in Maynooth, Ireland. These have certainly been experiences of great responsibility, yet memorable for me.

Again in Spain

Requested to work again in the Province of Spain, my first mission was as bursar of the formation house, thus becoming a member of the formation team and collaborating in Spiritan Family Animation.

After some time I was again elected Provincial Bursar, Provincial House Bursar and First Provincial Assistant.

Currently, I am Superior and bursar of the formation house, member of the formation team, mission procurator, assistant to the Provincial Bursar, member of Spiritan Family Animation and also representative of the Province of Spain for the new Spiritan Community of the Union of Circumscriptions of Europe, in Castrillo de la Vega and of the ADROGA Association.

I see that I do not lack work or the will to do so, but I must be realistic and prepare for the final stage of my life; first thanking the Lord of

the harvest for all the good I have received and secondly, thanking the Congregation for always having welcomed me and encouraged my poor services.

I do not know if I contributed much or little; it is clear that we can always give more where we are, but there is one thing I am sure of: the Spiritan Community has always given me strength, because where there is charity and love, there is God.

A MISSIONARY IN BRUSSELS

Christian Roberti

For twenty years I worked in the health service of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (R.D.C.), more precisely in Kindu, Kongo and Kabongo. I was responsible for organizing primary health care and these years have affected me deeply.

I left the Congo voluntarily in 1999 after having been replaced by a fellow Congolese doctor whom I had mentored for a while and who subsequently not only continued but developed greatly the work I had begun right up to the present day. To make myself redundant has been like a leitmotiv from the beginning of my career and my goal has been attained. Looking back, I think it is better like this: history and mission have evolved and my time as a missionary doctor in Africa is over. Since my return to Europe I have not received any more requests to go back to the Congo as a doctor.

After a renewal course at the Institute of Tropical Medicine at Anvers, I was employed in July 2000 by MEMISA Belgium, a Christian-inspired medium-sized Belgian NGO for medical development (www.memisa.be). Its aims correspond closely to those of the Spiritans – to be at the service of the poor and abandoned. I have worked there since for four days a week, principally being co-responsible for medical programmes in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Islamic Republic of Mauritania. So, in a way, I continue my work with Africans from a distance, even though I do have to spend a few weeks each year in these two countries. Working at MEMISA means first of all trying to listen to the local people and respond to their needs; it also means living from day to day in communication with indigenous health professionals who put into practice in their countries the programmes agreed in common. Thus I have the chance to create links and put many people coming from the North and the South in contact with each other. Subsequently I was joined at MEMISA by another Spiritan, Fr. Joseph Burgraff, who then became its President!

At the close of the Provincial Chapter in 2003 the Provincial Council of Belgium asked me to take over the post of Provincial Co-ordinator for JPIC from Fr. Jos de Backere. I accepted this even though I could only do it part-time. The Provincial Council gave me a budget of three thousand euro a year, expecting me to carry out the job while regularly indicating the areas I should be involved in.

I began by visiting my confreres in the Province once a year to keep them informed and support them in however small a way, in their JPIC commitments. At the beginning, because of my lack of experience, my confreres thought I was coming to interfere in their personal lives or to recruit them in some enterprise. Gradually however, trust was built up between us and confreres began to sign petitions, take part in campaigns like that of Amnesty International for the support of political prisoners and so on.

After a period of preparation which lasted more than a year, the confreres, gathered at the Provincial Chapter of 2006, agreed to commit themselves to a JPIC plan for the coming four years. The plan included the following elements:

- care for the sick and elderly confreres in the context of an aging Province; though still about thirty in total, the average age is over 75
- support for confreres in difficult situations
- giving assistance to refugees and illegal immigrants
- playing a full part in the Africa-Europe Faith and Justice Network (AEFJN)

In this plan, it was that of 'care for the sick and elderly' which interested the Province most.

For my own part, I had already been working with the sick for some years. To be truthful, I was reluctant to leave all contact with the sick and I began to visit AIDS sufferers in St. Peter's government hospital in Brussels; alas, the head hospital chaplain in Brussels preferred me to go St. Anne's clinic, a private establishment of the 'classical' variety which

needed volunteers. Eventually, to be more in line with the action plan of the 2006 chapter, I left this visiting of the sick and committed myself to working with refugees and illegal immigrants. This was hard for me to do because I loved visiting the sick and I had become accustomed to the atmosphere in St. Anne's clinic.

It is estimated there are about 100,000 illegal immigrants in Belgium and they are among the most abandoned people of our society; they have no rights whatsoever except that of medical help in cases of serious sickness – many of them are afraid to seek this as their presence then becomes known. Illegal immigrants are just like 'non-persons', ghosts who have no other option to survive but to work clandestinely in conditions which are often sub-human. I got involved as a volunteer in the Belgian branch of Jesuit Refugee Services (JRS Belgium). Through this NGO I was able to make friendly visits to three detention centres where failed asylum seekers awaited repatriation or return to the EU country where they made their first request for asylum (the so-called "Dublin procedure"). These people, who had committed no crime against anyone, strongly resented being locked up and could not understand why. The fact that someone was ready to visit them and listen to them was a sign that someone cared about them and gave them a dignity which the whole process of seeking asylum completely denied them. I would not like to elaborate on the violence some of them suffered and the violations of human rights they were subjected to at various times of their detention – above all at the time of their expulsion from the country. Is it not understandable that some of them go on hunger strike, mutilate themselves and attempt suicide?

Another aspect of my involvement was the part I played in the Belgian branch of AEFJN; our aim was to lobby the European Union concerning many of its decisions which could have harmful effects on fragile African economies. Once again I came in touch with Africa, but this time in the role of a European citizen working against the structural causes of under-development. To engage in lobbying is similar to working like an ant – often you are completely unaware as to whether your efforts have borne any fruit for 'distant neighbours' you are defending and with whom you have no direct contact. But what is encouraging for lobbyists is work-

ing together: our branch was one of thirteen and had about twenty members, part of the wider network of AEFJN branches in Europe made up of about fifty missionary congregations. Our knowledge of the grass-roots is appreciated at the heart of the European structures which we target; political representatives and European functionaries take note of what we say and seek our expertise, because, unlike lobbyists working on behalf of an enterprise, missionaries have no profit motive. Never yet has the little cross I wear round my neck proved to be an obstacle in this endeavour.

The ten European Spiritan JPIC Provincial Co-ordinators meet every year in their commission to share their experiences and work out how to be more effective. At the request of my fellow Co-ordinators, I agreed to ensure the continuity of the commission for two mandates of three years; Fr. Jean-Pierre Gaillard helped me in this task which I felt at first was completely beyond me. Then, with the creation of the Union of Circumscriptions of Europe (UCE) and the setting up of Circumscription Europe in 2006, I realized the need to organize and co-ordinate our commitments on a European level, and I proposed to the European Provincials that they create the post of European Co-ordinator, charged with establishing a permanent office for Spiritan lobbying in Brussels and with supporting the European JPIC Provincial Co-ordinators, some of whom existed in name only; after a long period of discernment, the UCE accepted this proposal.

In Brussels there are also meetings of Christian-Muslim dialogue groups which I sometimes attend but am not very active in. My visits to Mauritania for MEMISA inspired in me a great respect for the Muslims I met, some of whom have become friends. There is much discussion in the Belgian Province concerning Islam in Europe and I make my contribution based on my concrete experiences of this group in Brussels. One confrere has made attempts at dialogue with an Imam and we sometimes talk about this together. During the European Spiritans' JPIC Commission meetings, the subject of Islam often arises, but progress remains to be made on this without delay.

I give thanks to God who has chosen me "to serve in his presence"; I am happy as a brother to fulfil, with all my limitations, the tasks he has given me to do. I aim at being of service to Africans while staying in Europe, in my case in Brussels, because it is there that I am committed and there that I meet missionary situations lacking labourers. Such missionary situations are recognized by our chapters and by the Congregation, and it is precisely there that I can be most useful for Africans, for the Church and for the Congregation.

Mariano Espinoza belongs to Paraguay International Group. In this article he writes on his involvement as a brother in the refugee ministry in Tanzania.

Brief history

In 1998 I finished my theological studies in Brazil. In May 1999 I set off for Montreal, in Quebec, Canada to do a training course in the Montreal Institute of Integral Human Formation, which specializes in giving a holistic formation to students.

During the three years of the course I had the opportunity to strike up relationships with people from the African continent. In the therapy sessions on traumatic stress, which took place in groups, I had my first contact with the dramatic experiences of the inhabitants of the Great Lakes area of Central Africa: organized massacres, rape, genocide, ethnic persecution etc. These resulted in thousands of people crossing international borders looking for refuge. Refugee camps were formed, offering protection and security to thousands who had fled, many of whom had escaped certain death.

It was through these contacts that I began to have an interest in making a contribution to helping the victims of this cruel past. On finishing my studies, and after making final vows, I asked, as my first appointment (now called mission appointment), to be part of a Spiritan team working in the refugee camps of Tanzania.

The community of Nyakitonto

In July 2003 I arrived in Tanzania, a country of which I was completely ignorant. Africa! The continent Libermann dreamed of! I too was full of dreams, hopes and desires to work there – on mission and for the mission. I had faith in the future and in Him who brought me to Tanzania, the God of life, the universal God.

In February 2004, after some months of learning Swahili, the language common to all Tanzanians, I joined the Spiritan Refugees Service (SRS) team, in the community in Nyakitonto.

The Community of Nyakitonto! A real face, reflecting the contemporary reality of the Holy Spirit Congregation. Diversity, dialogue, different cultures, languages and characters... being forged into a harmony of feeling and common vision: the fleshing out in our lives of the ideas of Poullart des Places and Francis Libermann, the twin poles of reference in our Spiritan calling. What struck me right from the beginning was the community's simplicity and capacity to adapt to the surroundings. These are aspects that make us proud of being Spiritans.

The Nyakitonto community serves as a home-base for us who form the team that works with the refugees in the Kigoma region. Our physical space is different from the daily reality of the camps, thus allowing us to be present in a more effective way. If it weren't for this we would be swallowed up by the problems of the refugees and might run the risk of burn-out. Our community is where we find support; it is like a spring that refreshes us, giving us strength, energy and faith for our insertion in the refugees' milieu.

The Refugee Camps

There is something hard, cruel and dehumanizing about these camps, yet at the same time they provide a refuge, security and home for thousands of people who have fled the clutches of one of the greatest and most shameful plagues of humanity: genocide. In the 20th century many countries experienced the horror of genocide, particularly in Africa.

Burundi, a small country in the heart of Africa, is a sad example of this. It neighbours, Tanzania, which has taken in thousands of Burundian refugees, setting up camps especially for them. These are well set up and controlled by the Tanzanian authorities and administered by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The refugees cannot travel freely in Tanzania, they have to live within the parameters of

the camp and they can only go out if they have a permit from the Ministry of Home Affairs. About 45,000 people live within an area of some six by three km. It is easy to see how an individual in this situation must feel cramped in his personal development and restricted in the exercise of his freedom. His capacity to take initiatives and be creative, to plan for the future and develop his qualities and talents – in a word, to grow as a human being in all his fullness – is severely limited. Such people, having no name and no identity, are classed by a word, by a name that is not a name: *Refugees*. This context makes them permanently vulnerable and even determines their way of looking at the world and at life, of living in society and relating to others. It even influences the very way they see God and relate to Him.

The Refugee Camp is a very special context, a unique reality. We have been present in this world of the refugee for more than ten years. I have been in this ministry for six years now. We came in obedience to a call, in an effort to respond to a sign of the times in the contemporary world. The phenomenon of refugees is a cry disturbing our consciences and clamouring for a response.

Many are the challenges we have to face up to if we want to continue in the midst of these people. But with faith and hope we wish to be a sign of solidarity and to try and be witnesses to Jesus of Nazareth, whose priority was always the poor. I want to be able to dream that one day the world will awake without refugees and that each human being might find the place where he belongs to be able to live in dignity in this big house, our Earth.

Spiritan Charism

In the last few General Chapters the Congregation has shown great sensitivity to the new realities and challenges facing our contemporary world. The phenomenon of refugees is one of them.

In the effort to make our charism real in the world of today the Congregation decided to make work with refugees a priority. It is a need that

demands a response from us, it is humanity crying out to us, it is a situation of human and material poverty that demands our urgent attention. At the origin of our Congregation, both Poullart des Places and Francis Libermann were sensitive to situations in the civil society and in the Church which needed a response. The reality of refugees is a whole bundle of needs: suffering, poverty, misery, injustice... a situation of extreme vulnerability, that is, a missionary terrain ideally suited to Spiritans.

It is in this context that we are trying to live out our Spiritan charism, I as a Brother in what I bring that is special, and my confreres who bring what is special to them as priests, in close collaboration and complementarity. The specific function of each one, far from widening the gap between us, is a source of enrichment and a reason for giving praise. Beyond the specificity of functions is the very reason for our being, our life option: TO BE SPIRITAN. *Cor unum et anima una.*

Brother MARIANO ESPINOZA CSSP

MY JOURNEY TO THE RELIGIOUS LIFE

CONSTANT TAGYANG

The author tells about himself, his personal and pastoral experience and how he became a spiritan brother. He also shares with us the challenges and the joys that he has encountered since becoming brother.

The Beginnings:

My name is Constant Tagyang. I was born on 19th September 1970 in a farming village called Fielmuo in the North Western corner of Ghana, West Africa. I was the fifth child of ten children of my parents, four boys and six girls. I was baptised at infancy into the Catholic faith and was brought up in the Catholic tradition. I had my primary and the then middle school education in my village, St. Paul's Catholic Primary School and St. Paul's Catholic Middle School between 1976 and 1986.

I got the desire (vocation) to the religious life at the age of 16 when I was in middle school form four. One may ask how it all happened. Very simple! It was at the end of the third term in middle school form four that our Geography teacher announced to the whole class that he was going to join the Brothers of the Immaculate Conception, otherwise known as the FIC Brothers. At that moment something indescribable permeated through my whole body. A feeling I have never experienced before engulfed my entire being. Yes, that is the beginning of a turning point in my life at that tender age. My journey towards the religious life had begun though I dare not mention it to my parents at that stage for fear that they might rebuke me for conceiving such an idea that was not culturally popular in our society. Thus I hid the idea away from my parents and friends while I continued to deepen my affection for the religious life secretly. After completing middle school, I gained admission in 1987 to a Technical/Vocational Institute that was run by the FIC Brothers.

ers to specialise in Furniture Design and Construction and General Woodwork. Meanwhile, my desire towards the religious life was still on the ascendancy and cannot remain a secret forever. Consequently, I informed the Vocations Coordinator of the FIC Brothers in the school about my future plans and subsequently I was enrolled into the aspirancy programme of the FIC Brothers. All this while my parents were still not in the know about what I intended to do with my life. It was during our first term holidays in my first year at the school that I had to gather courage to inform my father about my desire to embrace the religious life after school. His response was spontaneous: "You are free to do so if that is what you want". I felt so elated and excited and breathed a sigh of relief. At long last I have crossed the last hurdle that was in front of me and the way is now cleared of obstacles for me to start treading the path towards what I so much desired, the religious life.

How I became a Spiritan:

I graduated from the Technical/Vocational Institute in 1990. Between 1990 and 1991 I was working with a Lebanese Contractor in my home Region of Wa in Carpentry and Joinery. It was during this period that I met the first Spiritans who happened to come from the same Region as me. This was on a Sunday morning at Holy Mass when I spotted the two young men dressed in white soutanes with black ropes (cinctures) tied round their waists. I was immediately moved and attracted by their mode of dress and was curious to find out who they were and to what order they belonged. After Holy Mass I had a chat with them and they told me all about the Spiritans. I became more inclined towards the Spiritans at the mention that they are religious as well as missionaries. That missionary Spirit dominated my whole being in my discernment process and that in turn strengthened my zeal for the religious life. Hence, I wrote to the Vocations Director of the Spiritans expressing my desire to be part of that unique family. Eventually I was enlisted into the Spiritan Aspirancy Programme where I had the opportunity to meet other aspirants on Encounter Days (Come and See Programmes). These encounter days helped to deepen and solidify my aspirations for the religious and missionary life. During this period of aspirancy with the Spiritans, the Vocations Director paid me a visit in Wa and among other issues discussed were my

readiness to begin Postulancy (Pre-Novitiate) the coming year. I was filled with joy by that visit and I also felt honoured that the Vocations Director had to travel many miles to visit me in my nothingness. Indeed I was humbled by that visit and I felt in a similar way as Elizabeth felt when Mary visited her after the Angel had brought her the Good News. cf Lk. 1:43. Towards the end of 1991 I received an invitation letter to begin the Postulancy Programme the following year. I was over-joyed with the content of the letter and I started to make the necessary preparations for that. I must mention that before I left to begin the Postulancy Programme, I had met with the Vocations Director of the FIC Brothers to inform him about the new development that had taken place in my discernment process. He was very happy about my choice and he encouraged me to go ahead with the Spiritans.

Initial Formation:

In January 1992, I began the Postulancy Programme (Pre-Novitiate) in Kumasi, Ghana. We were seven in number and I was the only brother candidate in the group. However, everything was done in common. It was interesting but very often challenging. Being the only Northerner and also the only brother candidate in the group, many occasions I had to be very assertive in order to feel part of the same group. There were moments I really felt lonely and always wondered whether or not I would continue. I went through some form of identity crisis at the very beginning of my initial formation. I began to ask myself a series of questions inwardly: Is it because I am the only Northerner that I am not fitting well into the group? Is it because I am the only brother candidate? Have I made a mistake by joining a clerical Congregation? Would I be better fitted in an all Brother Congregation? I could not find the answers to these questions and I could not discuss them with someone I could confide in – a friend or a Spiritual Director. I had not had a friend yet nor a Spiritual Director with whom I could share my fears and isolation. In fact, throughout the Postulancy year I never had Spiritual Direction. The Vocations Director who had admitted me and my colleagues to the Postulancy had left the Congregation for good before we reported to begin the programme. The news of his departure from the Congregation had created a vacuum in my life. This is because he encouraged and urged me

on to continue my vocation to the brotherhood. In my confused state, I felt let down by the Vocations Director. I could not imagine how someone who had been instrumental and inspirational in my vocation had suddenly left the very Congregation that he had been encouraging me to join. Nonetheless, with determination and prayer I went through the Postulancy Programme successfully, though with some difficulties. Five out of the seven postulants were recommended to go to the Novitiate and I was among the five that were recommended.

My group went to the Novitiate at Ejisu, near Kumasi, Ghana, joined by others from Nigeria (Makurdi) and Sierra Leone respectively. In total we were ten novices and I was still the only brother candidate. There in the Novitiate, the situation was different for me. I was having Spiritual Direction once every week as did everyone else. My Novice Master had always encouraged me never to feel inferior simply because I was a brother candidate. He had always advised me to be content with my vocation. Sometimes he tried to tell me some of the great works that had been done by brothers in the Congregation and that was a source of great inspiration for me in my vocation. In fact, I integrated better in the Novitiate group than in the Pre-Novitiate group. I made my first profession on 8th September 1993.

After my first vows I proceeded to the Spiritan Institute of Philosophy, also in Ejisu, Ghana, where I pursued philosophical studies for one year. In the community I was appointed the chief refectorian and some of my responsibilities included: Going to markets and shops to buy foodstuffs, toiletries and drinks for the community. The domestic staff otherwise known as the kitchen staff was under my jurisdiction. The Philosophy Community was quite lovely and the environment was more academic. Despite the academic nature of this stage of my formation, the formators ensured that apostolic work was integrated into the programme. Thus certain afternoons in the week we did home visitation in Ejisu and its environs to visit the aged, the sick, those whom society rejects, etc. These visits brought a lot of relief, a lot of hope and a lot of smiles to those visited. Though we could not provide for their physical needs but our presence was always reassuring for them. At least there were people who were willing to be with them and to listen to their stories. For me it was

an enriching experience and a foundation for my future ministry. It has made me aware of the need to always make myself available to the needy.

The next item waiting for me in my formation programme after Philosophy was Pastoral Experience Programme (PEP), popularly referred to as 'Prefecting'. I was appointed to Wukari, Taraba State in Northern Nigeria. We were three confreres in the Community comprising one Scottish and two Ghanaians. My apostolate there was both Pastoral and Social activities. I was made to manage the community finances as well. In the Pastoral side I was involved in conducting Communion Service and bringing Communion to the sick in their homes. I was also involved in awareness creation on social, moral and religious issues. For example, the HIV Aids pandemic: its causes and effects on society, teenage pregnancy and abortion, tribal and religious tolerance, water borne diseases, etc. I usually travelled to the different outstations with one of the catechists to show videos on the various themes. However, the video shows were usually preceded by talks on the issues at stake. I would spend about two to three days at each station that I visited. During the daytime there were group sharing and reflection on the movies they had watched. On the last day before I left each station one of the priest confreres would come and celebrate Holy Mass with the people. Much as the people had benefited from these programmes, it was a learning experience for me also. What I learned from the people through these programmes is helping me a lot for my own personal development. Another aspect of my apostolate that I found most intriguing was pastoral evaluation. At the end of every month the Community met to evaluate the work that each confrere had done and what had generally gone on in the Community. If there was an aspect that one needed to work on to improve things, one readily did that. It was a small community but supportive of each other. There was openness and the views of each confrere were treated with due respect. The Spirit of oneness was clearly visible in the community. Yes, I will always have good memories of my Pastoral Experience Programme year and I remained ever thankful to the two confreres I have lived with there. To a large extent they made my experience there such a memorable one.

On returning home from my PEP I went to do further courses in Woodwork after which I was assigned temporarily to one of our Parishes in

Bolgatanga in Northern Ghana in September 1999. We were a community of four: one Swiss, one Nigerian and two Ghanaians. Apart from the normal Sunday Pastoral activities, I was mainly involved with construction work in the Parish. The Parish was fairly new at that time with a lot of construction work going on. Here also, community meetings and evaluation of work were very central. My experience in this community was not too different from my experience during my PEP. I happily worked in this Parish for one year and in August 2000 I made my perpetual vows in the Congregation. Still in temporary appointment I was transferred from Bolgatanga to the Provincialate Community which was then in Kumasi. I was looking after the community finances whilst doing part-time teaching in a Catholic Technical Institute. My experience here was again different from the previous years. This time I was in a school situation and had to deal with students and fellow members of staff. I did this job for one academic year.

Ongoing Formation:

In August 2001, I had the opportunity to travel to Dublin in the Republic of Ireland to pursue other courses. I did Interior Design and School Chaplaincy and Pastoral Care respectively. While in Dublin I lived in Blackrock College Community. Blackrock College is one of the prestigious schools in Dublin that is owned by the Irish Spiritans. It is one of their schools. While pursuing my courses of studies I was attached to the Chaplaincy Team and the Technical Department of the College respectively for my internship. The Chaplaincy Team was responsible for organising masses, recollections, retreats and counselling for the different year groups and for the college staff. A pastoral programme is drawn up for each term for the different year groups. I was exposed to the spirit of team work and collaborative ministry. On the academic side I was teaching Technical Drawing to the third years.

In the community we were over forty confreres. The largest community I have ever lived in. Most of them had retired from active ministry and some were semi-retired. A very few confreres were in active ministry. Most of the retired and semi-retired confreres had worked in the college their whole lives. Though the community was an aging one but I felt very

much at home with everyone. Of course I had to adapt to the culture and the environment and that had really helped me to settle in well. The community tried to ensure that everything was fine with me and I did appreciate the fraternal care and concern exhibited by the confreres. In June 2004 I had completed the programmes I was studying and I returned home in July 2004.

Mission Appointment (First Appointment):

Before I completed my studies in Dublin I received my First Appointment letter, now Mission Appointment, from the Generalate. I was appointed to work in my home Province of WAP. On arrival home from Dublin I was anxiously waiting for the Provincial and his Council to assign me where to begin my apostolate. However, I had it already in my mind that I was certainly going to be assigned to a school apostolate. Guess what happened! That was not the case and it is still not the case. After my holidays the Provincial told me that he wanted me to take up the post of Provincial Bursar. I was dazed for a moment before I recovered from my bewilderment. I had never thought that I would one day work as Provincial Bursar. That thought had never crossed my mind before. So I asked the Provincial to give me time to think about it and to reflect over it. I began to consult some confreres about it but my worry was that I had no knowledge in accounting. Those I had consulted were all of the view that I take it up. Some, in fact, had told me bluntly that I do not need a degree in accounting to do bursary work and they continued to urge me not to decline the offer. Thus I willingly accepted the job whole heartedly. The next step is to prepare myself for this demanding job. Hence arrangements were made for me to go to Rome where I participated in an intensive eight weeks workshop in accounting. In fact, that workshop was of tremendous help to me in carrying out my responsibilities as bursar. I served the Province in that capacity for three years.

On the 4th of February 2008 I took up a new apostolate in Ghana with an NGO. The name of the NGO is DODZI FOUNDATION. It was started by a Dutch Social Worker by name: Louise Dorge, who had been working in Ghana for the past 35 years. She is 75 years old and she wants the

Spiritans to take over the management and ownership of the NGO. However, she requested that someone should be sent to understudy her for two years before she finally hands over the project to us. It was based on her request that I was appointed to that project. The NGO is involved in the provision of schools, from kindergartens to junior high schools, vocational learning centres and water and sanitation. This is my current apostolate. It is still a learning period for me and I hope that by the end of my two years induction period, I will have enough insight to carry on the goals and aspirations of Dodzi Foundation.

What is the Way Forward?

Looking back on my life as a brother in the Congregation, I would say there is so much that brothers can do to promote our common good. But we need to be given the chance and the opportunity to develop our potentials to the full. I am aware some circumscriptions are making everything possible to revitalise the vocation and ministry of brothers but that should cut across the board. That should be a task for all circumscriptions to try to breathe new life into this branch of the Spiritan family that is struggling to survive. In order for brothers to reach their full potential, the Congregation at large should make conscious efforts to redefine the identity of the brother. We should try to look at the brother of today from a different angle and with a different mind set than the brother of yesterday. Please I do not mean to degrade brothers in the older generation but I am trying to draw our attention to the fact that brothers in the past were considered more or less 'second class citizens'. I stand to be corrected if I am wrong. It is unfortunate but this notion or perception is still lingering on in some quarters and if left unchecked, it may continue to deter potential candidates who might have wished to embrace this noble vocation in the Congregation as brothers. The world is fast moving and we must be abreast with the changing world. Who in this present generation would like to join any society that will consider him or her a less important member? The short fall in the number of candidates aspiring to the brotherhood can point to this issue of 'classism'. The vocation of brothers in the Congregation is at its lowest point and we need to take pragmatic steps to resuscitate it.

I think it is also time that brothers in the Congregation begin to have regional meetings and one general forum, say every five years, involving all brothers in the Congregation. This will give them the opportunity to interact with one another, discuss their common problems and try to find the way forward. There are other avenues that can be employed to sensitise the vocation of brothers. I believe that with a concerted effort the vocation of brothers will be brought back to greater heights. We rely on the co-operation and support of all confreres to realise this goal with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

BROTHER FRANCIS SULLIVAN

Br Francis Sullivan, 90 passed away in Arusha, Tanzania on March 10, 2009. He was the last brother in the US East Province after 56 years of missionary apostolate in Tanzania where he was sent in 1953 until his death. The letter below is being published posthumously.

The following is a letter from Brother Francis Sullivan in response to a questionnaire sent out round the Congregation asking for ideas about the promotion of the vocation of brother in the Congregation. In terms of faith and fidelity and passion for mission the letter speaks for itself and its author.

14 February 2007

Dear Fr. Kingston,

Due to a change in address, I received your letter just a few days ago. Being late in answering, I'll state a few facts and figures and ideas and hope you can make something out of this letter, I've been around for eighty-eight years, and have been working here in Tanzania for the past fifty-three years, having arrived here when this was known as Tanganyika Territory. I spent ten years in the diocese of Moshi constructing all sorts of buildings, churches, schools and what not, whatever was needed. I was not trained for this work in any way having worked as an airplane mechanic for many years. But I was sent out here from the US East Province to build and that's what I've been doing. But in any case, after working for ten years in the Moshi Diocese I could see a well-developed diocese with its own bishop, many priests, sisters and brothers as well, and I thought to myself "What am I doing here?" But happily the good Lord heard my prayer and our Provincial Superior arrived one day and told me that I could start work in the Arusha areas. This was much more in line, as missionaries that we are, with its vast areas of Masailand. With the people scattered far and wide. With unlimited possibilities for work to be done, there was myself and a German brother to take care of it. Our dear brother didn't survive very long hav-

ing been out here for many years. So there I was, with so much to do and, as is still the case today, the only brother on the scene. It has been very interesting work, however, over more recent years of building up outstations among the Christian communities, staying for weeks at a time with my workmen getting churches and houses started with an occasional visit from the padre.

The work here is really the work of the Congregation, first evangelisation, but very few confreres seem to be interested in it. It's very difficult to find anyone who is willing to stay out with the people. It seems to be a special calling. Is it because in the training, we don't have those who have real missionary experience in this work? I don't know the overall picture but from what I have seen, this is what I have concluded.

One thing I think should be brought up is the fact that although the Congregation is committed to bringing the "good news of salvation" to those who have not heard it or those who have scarcely heard it. How many are actually engaged in this work? Those who have not heard the good news are those who are far from the cities and towns, out in the "boondocks" as they say. I think this problem goes back to the training. There are people in these far-out places who are very religiously inclined waiting for someone to help them. I've been working at, trying to build their churches - great opportunities are lost in these situations.

For missionaries, this is a very satisfying work, being among these people - if only they knew.

I sincerely feel that if we concentrate our efforts on this main commitment of the Congregation, the good Lord will help us with real missionary vocations, brothers as well as fathers.

I don't think we can go wrong in following our venerable founder with his solid training program for religious missionaries based on "union with God" and his well laid plans for sending these missionaries out to follow in the footsteps of the Holy Apostles.

Wishing you all the best for our push for brothers,

Br. Francis Sullivan, CSSp.
P.O. Box 80
Mto Wa Mbu
Tanzania

SPIRITAN BROTHERS

Some reflexions from the group of Pakistan

The Pakistan Group shares with us a reflection of the role that brothers have always played in their Group especially that of leadership and animation. The reflection underlines that Spiritan vocation comes first regardless of whether one is a brother or a cleric and that it should foster equality among us.

Our experience in Pakistan has been extremely positive, not being ordained has never been an appendage but work of the highest quality has been the rule. There has always been equality and it has usually been a brother who has been elected as Group leader.

We see in Chapter One of our Rule of Life the vision of our Spiritan vocation and it is non-clerical. The decision to be a Spiritan is primary, choice of ministry is secondary.

It is the responsibility of those in administration and formation to continually emphasise this keystone on which we are held together.

Brothers are few in number because of the emphasis on priestly formation, philosophy and theology, parish administration and sacraments. Formation at present does not have other professional courses. A modification of Spiritan formation is called for, all should have the same possibilities up to the novitiate. After that one may discern which path to follow.

Different educational standards for entry to the Congregation creates inequality, qualifications for entry should be based on the same relative educational standard for all.

Our common life our fraternity unite us, we have lost the impact of the word 'fraternity'.

Community living is primary where all are brothers. Different paths are an enrichment, that is what we have very concretely experienced, both in our life together and in the apostolate.

**Ideas shared during our Spiritan meeting,
Karachi, April 2006**

SPIRITAN RELIGIOUS FOR FIFTY FIVE YEARS

Brother Edward Gross

These articles appeared first in Écho de la Mission and are reprinted here with permission from the publishers.

My vocation took root in fertile soil. Following in the footsteps of Fr. Alphonse Guhmann, six young men from Herrlisheim entered the Congregation of the Holy Spirit; I was the last of them to answer the Lord's call.

I entered Neufgrange in 1946 at the age of eleven. After four years in the apostolic school and two years of apprenticeship in carpentry in the brothers' postulancy, I did my novitiate at Piré-sur-Seiche (Ille-et Vilaine) under Fr. Arthur Bohn; then, as a young professed, I continued my formation at Chevilly-Larue (Val de Marne) from 1953 to 1956. This was followed by two years' military service in Algeria.

On my return, I enrolled for an intense course on masonry, in view of my later departure on mission: "Before you put in any doors and windows you have to put up some walls" was the explanation given so that I would accept training in another trade. However, to show that the Lord does not lack a sense of humour, I ended up after this as a member of the maintenance team for five years, under the Provincial Bursar. This gave me a good chance to see around France a bit: Bletterans (Jura), Saint-Illan (Côtes d'Armor), Maulévrier (Maine et Loire) and finally Neufgrange.

At last in 1964 I went to the Indian Ocean; I spent two years in Rodrigues, an island 75 kilometres square dependent on Mauritius. To give you some idea of the size of my "rock", it can fit eight times into Lake Geneva! It had 28,000 inhabitants, less than in the town of Haguenau. While in Rodrigues I built an agricultural school.

In 1966 I went to the “big island”, Madagascar, which has an area larger than the whole of France! In the diocese of Majunga (now called Mahajanga) I had the job of doing all the building repairs.

My missionary life overseas lasted ten years. In 1974 I returned to France. I worked distributing the magazine *Écho de la Mission* and the East-Moselle calendar; I took this up a second time after I had spent seven years welcoming guests to the Provincial House at rue Lhomond in Paris. Since last September, because of the closure of the house at Neufgrange, I continue my work distributing the magazine from the house of Saint-Florent at Saverne. Distributing the *Écho* and the calendar means visiting the zelators, the families of Spiritan confreres and friends of the Congregation. It also means keeping up to date with subscriptions and their renewal. This requires perseverance and a good deal of tact. It is not easy these days to find successors to elderly or sick zelators. Recently a subscriber asked to meet me. After three interviews she told me that she did not want to continue her subscription. I could see eventually that she had been through so much suffering – illness, death of loved ones – that she could see no sense in anything any more.

However, I want to emphasise that in general I get a good reception, and this remains a great comfort to me. Many zelators and subscribers have become good friends who look forward to my visits. Of course, I spend a lot of time on the road, but it is certainly not time wasted. I have time to pray for families I have just visited and to prepare myself for those I am about to meet. This is my way, as a religious, of putting into practice the words of St. Paul: “*Carry each others’ burdens and you will carry out the law of Christ*”. (Gal.6.2.)

I want to say again a sincere word of thanks to all those who show their interest in mission by means of the distribution and promotion of the *Écho* and the calendar. I assure them all of my prayers.

(Taken from *Écho de la Mission* May/June 2008)

MISSIONARY'S LIFE JOURNEY IN FRANCE

Brother Dominique Wack, (48 years a Spiritan religious)

In 1955 I was a border at St. Charles of Schiltigheim, a school run at the time by the Sisters of All Saints. A visiting Spiritan gave me a copy of *Écho des Missions*, as it was then called, and encouraged me to read it carefully, which I did. It is because of this reading that I decided to become a religious brother in the Congregation of the Holy Spirit.

In 1964 at the end of my religious and professional formation, I was appointed chief chef at Neufgrange, with responsibility also for training young cooks to get their qualifications. On two occasions, the quality of the formation given was recognized by the county authorities, and twice, in 1975 and 1977 we won the silver medal in the Eurogast competition at Sarrebruck.

Following the close of this college in 1984 I was appointed to the Provincial house at 30 rue Lhomond, Paris, a community which always had a big number of visitors, where I was head cook until 1995. While here I helped the Emmaus group give out soup to the homeless at various metro stations – Châtelet and Place d'Italie in particular – over five winters.

was happy to win a prize in a competition in 1994 for my recipe which I called "bäckoafa aux cannelonis".

In 1995, at the same time as I went back to my home region of Alsace, I began a new kind of service in the house of Saint Florent in Saverne. I was given the job of promoting and distributing the review *Écho de la Mission* and the Spiritan calendar in the east of the country.

I used to visit the zelators and agents for the review in the Lower Rhine and that part of Moselle close to Saverne; these groups were a valuable link with the subscribers and deserved encouragement and grat-

itude. Their commitment to mission demanded a lot, but I cannot understate my admiration for them, echoed very often by other confreres. I kept up a regular correspondence with the zelators and subscribers and it became one of my most important jobs.

In the context of Justice and Peace I am a member of 'Artisans du Monde' which promotes fair trade and I take part in some inter-confessional dialogue.

Weekly visits to the sick in Saverne hospital, animation of the Rosary Team at Dabo (Moselle), organizing the liturgy in our house – all these are elements of my life as a Spiritan brother. I cannot forget that I was a cook for thirty one years, so I regularly put my culinary talents at the service of the community at weekends.

While being a member of a missionary Congregation, I have never crossed any seas, but I still feel fully a missionary. Fr. Libermann himself assures me of this in a letter he actually wrote to the brothers:

"Mission does not mean going to far places; it is to be found wherever God puts us... You will not do the work in your name; it is God who sends you and the Holy Spirit who guides you".

Over the years, these words of Fr. Libermann have enlightened and continue to enlighten my path as a Spiritan brother.

SPIRITAN LIFE AND VOCATION

This text appeared first in the Anima Una no 62 of the EGC "Building on Rock". If we want to get more brothers in the Congregation, we must change our attitude.

1 Brothers: Observation:

During the EGC when the question of the brothers was being dealt with a document produced by Carmo, a brother, on the early history of the brothers in Libermann's time was eagerly received by the confreres. There seems to be a desire among members of the Congregation to know more about the history of the brothers. In the synthesis of the reports from the work groups it also seems evident that more needs to be known about this vocation. There is much anecdotal and archive material about the brothers in the Congregation but perhaps there is a need for a more scientific historical work to be written. Could the GC commission such a work?

- The first point that seems obvious from all the work that has been done on the question of the brothers is that we want brothers in the Congregation. "Our Congregation needs brothers for its mission".
- In all of the findings including those of the EGC it is clear that a number of major obstacles prevent the flourishing of this vocation: lack of any Spiritan vocations in parts of the world, too much emphasis on sacramental, parochial ministry, lack of understanding of this vocation, strange ecclesiologies in the heads of confreres who cannot see what ministry a Spiritan who is not ordained can possibly do, lack of vocations animation in relation to the brother's vocation, lack of publicity about this way of being Spiritan, clerical exclusiveness and simply clericalism. From this list it seems obvious that a serious change of mentality is required especially if we hope to get the vocation to brotherhood off the ground in the circumscriptions which enjoy a flourishing of Spiritan vocations, but there are also practical things that can be done to improve the

situation. The way forward is surely to focus on the positive suggestions coming from the EGC.

- In the first place a Spiritan brother is a Spiritan confrere, a missionary religious and this needs to be emphasised in a variety of ways:
 - giving due solemnity and attention to religious profession (not only of the brothers);
 - celebrating the jubilees of religious profession;
 - suppressing high-sounding titles like “Holy Ghost Fathers”, “Peres do St. Esprit”, “Padres do Espirito Santo”.

- Vocation ministry:

It is in the young circumscriptions where we still have many vocations that we must make the greatest effort for the greater visibility of our “missionary being” which cannot be reduced to the sacramental ministry of the priest. The General Council needs to have a policy of constantly reminding the superiors and circumscriptions about the brothers and the need for constant publicity, vocation animation and general appreciation of the brothers. Since we began our dialogue with the membership of the Congregation about the brothers, the topic has certainly emerged from the darkness and been given attention and publicity (in publications and vocation leaflets etc.). The EGC also asked that “the topic of the brothers would be taken into account in debates, meetings and circumscription assemblies”. We of the GC can help with this in our visits to circumscriptions, formation communities, assemblies, chapters etc and in our own publications. Another proposal from the EGC was that the next meeting organised by the Congregation dealing with formation should be devoted to “the topic of the brother’s vocation”. It could figure as part of a wider agenda.

1. Mission: “Our vision for mission is realised under three forms of vocation: priest, brother, lay associate.” What is clear from the reports of the work groups is that the brother is like any other Spiritan confrere at the heart of Spiritan mission which is the mission of the Church. Negatively it was said that “the parish structure

based on sacramental economy does not help much to give visibility to the brother's vocation". Another affirmation was that "we need to be clear first of all on the preferences and options to be made for the mission of the brother in order to then envisage and propose an adequate formation". It was also suggested to "propose certain concrete services provided by brothers at present, to inspire the formation of future brothers". This is a bit vague, but we can imagine what people have in mind, for example brothers who are highly competent in professional fields, like medicine, architecture, engineering etc and who also bring another special dimension to their work because they are religious and Spiritans. There is a debate which was not so present in the EGC as to whether we should have works specifically manned by brothers which would give a clear visibility to the brothers. This is very much an African idea at present. Some European brothers get angry with this idea because it seems to continue the separation of the brothers and the fathers. It was also seen as desirable to have brothers in all key positions in the Congregation where they can function competently including administration and formation.

2. Formation: "We need to propose an adequate missionary, religious and professional formation." It is true that our formation is meant to prepare us for lifelong community life and not just the acquisition of professional skills. "Redefine our cycles of formation including a common sector". "Our formation is too rigid, with too much insistence on direction rather than accompaniment." By "too rigid" it is not so clear what is meant but it could be that our formation is too uniform and does not take adequate account of the diversity of mission situations to which we are called nor the diversity of talents of those who are called.
3. Community life: The EGC insisted on inclusiveness and a balance of attention to the vocation of brother and father. The wish was voiced that "the brothers would know how to position themselves as full members (and not members completely apart) of the Congregation, and that they would be completely integrated with no complex". This will require us to "combat individualism and promote equality of economic treatment; mass stipends for example are not personal money, but income for the community and

must be put in the common kitty”. “Brothers and lay Associates should be given posts of responsibility in the Congregation. Specify what is common to all and that which is proper to the priest, brother and lay associate”.

- Other suggestions:

Get inspiration from what other congregations are doing to solve this problem;

As a GC we can make sure that the brother has a clear place in the preparation and realisation of the next General chapter, ensuring that there is a brother delegate at least.

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The Cover

The triangle represents the Trinity: it is coloured red to accentuate our dedication to the Holy Spirit. The blue circle signifies Mary who became the mother of Jesus through the Holy Spirit; therefore one of the points of the triangle cuts the circle. The green path represents hope. Thus the Congregation of the Holy Spirit, under the protection of Mary, is travelling along the path of hope and trust.

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